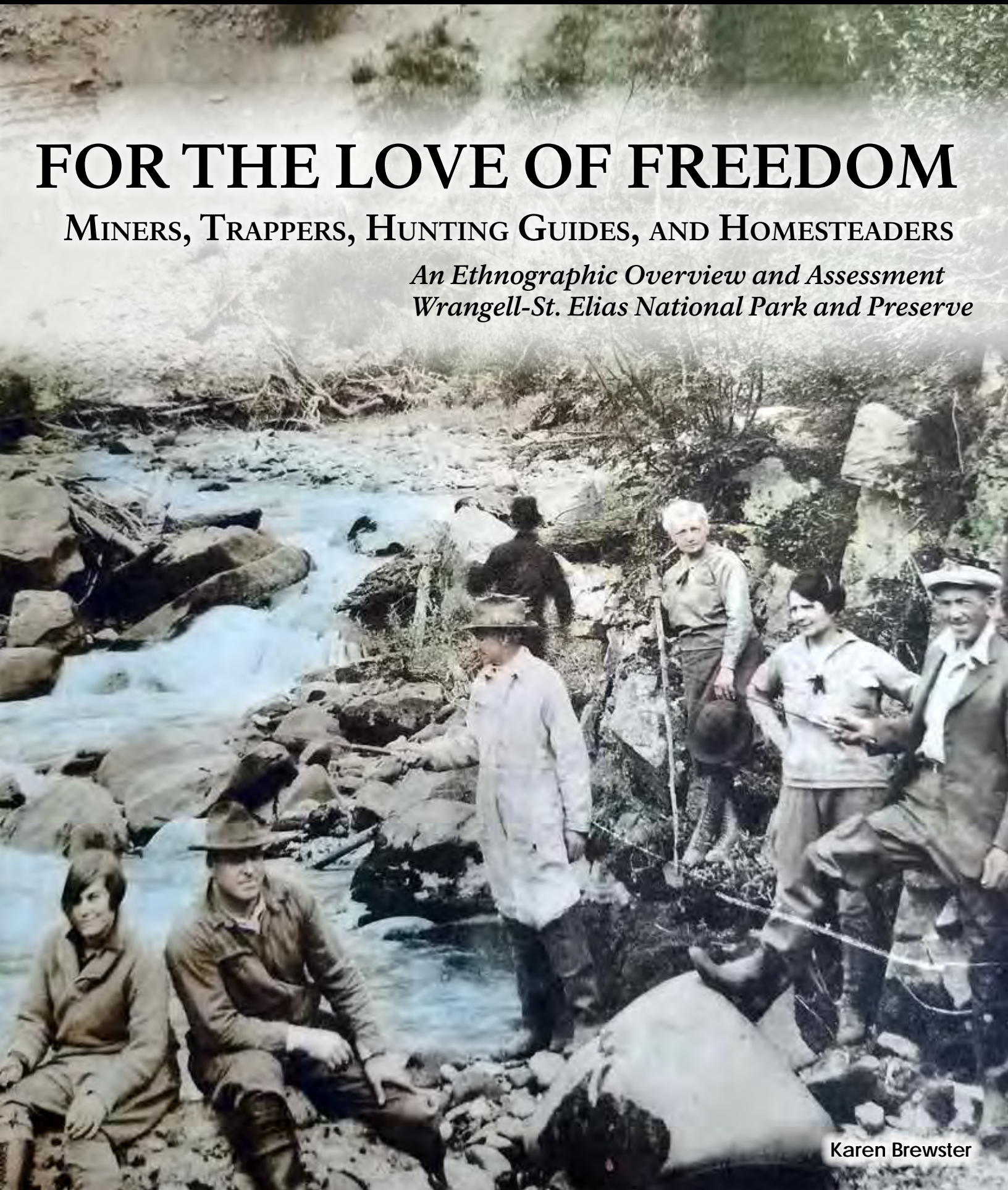




FOR THE LOVE OF FREEDOM

MINERS, TRAPPERS, HUNTING GUIDES, AND HOMESTEADERS

*An Ethnographic Overview and Assessment
Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve*





As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural and cultural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation.

The Cultural Resource Programs of the National Park Service have responsibilities that include stewardship of historic buildings, museum collections, archeological sites, cultural landscapes, oral and written histories, and ethnographic resources.

Our mission is to identify, evaluate and preserve the cultural resources of the park areas and to bring an understanding of these resources to the public. Congress has mandated that we preserve these resources because they are important components of our national and personal identity.



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For the Love of Freedom

Trappers, Hunting Guides, and Homesteaders: An Ethnographic Overview and Assessment

Karen Brewster

2018

Front cover photo: Left to right: Hilda Reynolds, unidentified man, Sheriff Reynolds, man with back to camera may be Martin Harrais, Margaret Keenan Harrais, Alvina Schultz, Henry Schultz. Photo developed and colored by Hubrick Photo Studio, McCarthy, Alaska, circa 1925. Estate of Alvina Schultz Collection, McCarthy-Kennicott Historical Museum.

Back cover photo: Jim and Maxine Edwards and their children, Shelly and Steve, at their original residence in McCarthy, 1966. Courtesy of the Edwards family.

FOR THE LOVE OF FREEDOM

MINERS, TRAPPERS, HUNTING GUIDES, AND HOMESTEADERS

*An Ethnographic Overview and Assessment
Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve*

By Karen Brewster

This country appealed to me so much when I first got here because we were totally free.

—Gary Green, McCarthy, 2016

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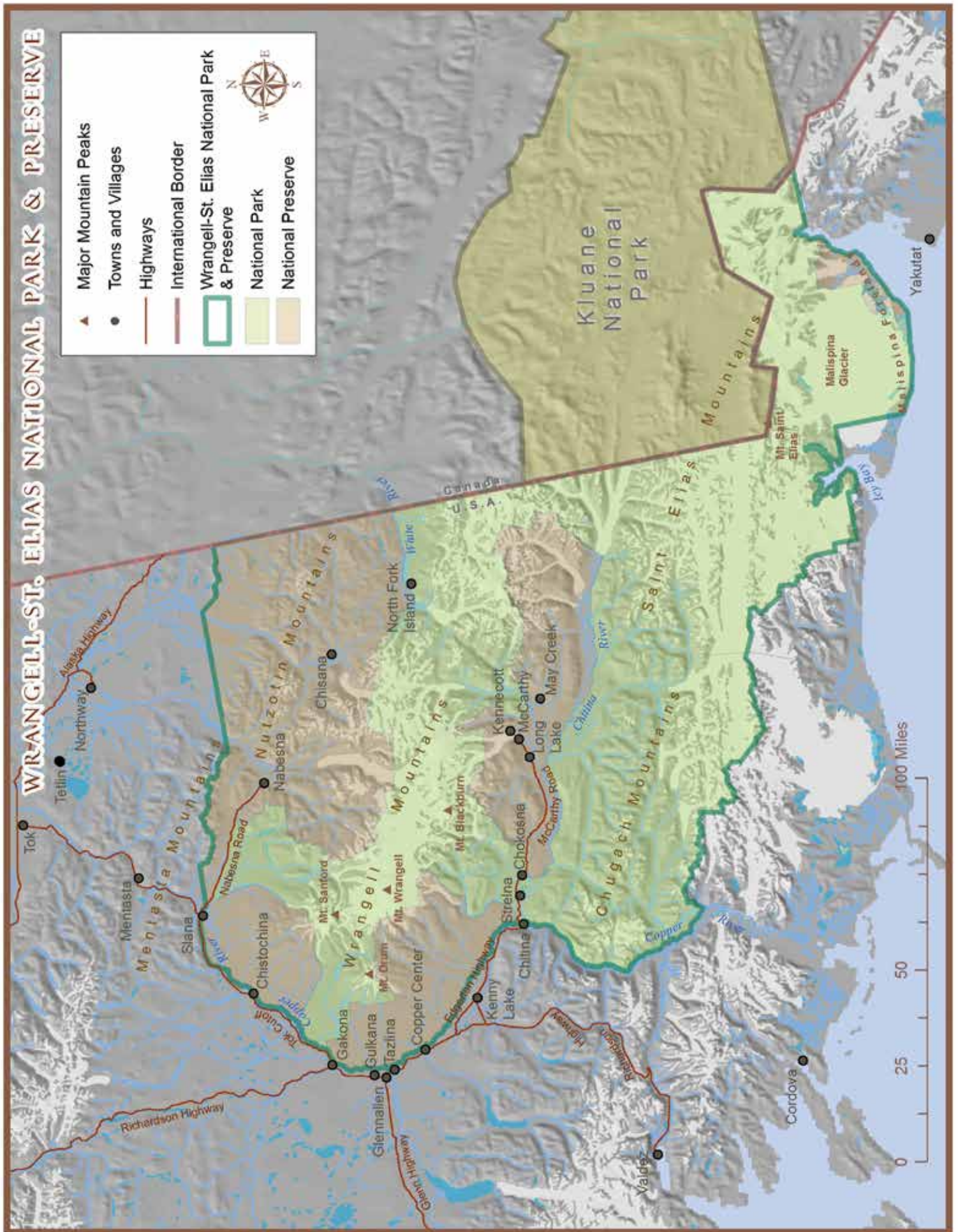
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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic overview and assessment documents the culture and traditions of non-Native communities and occupational groups traditionally associated with what is now Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, and demonstrates their use of park resources or occupancy of lands within park boundaries. These communities and occupational groups include, but are not limited to, small-scale miners, trappers, sport hunting guides, and homesteaders. Drawing upon existing ethnographic and historical documentation and oral history recordings along with some new oral history interviews conducted for this project, this study discusses what brought these groups of people to the region, why they chose to stay, and how they were able to make a living. It illustrates the adaptation, determination, flexibility, independence, and devotion of people who were once outsiders to transform a new and wild place into their home. Recommendations are made for future historical and ethnographic research to address identified data gaps.

Key Words: Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, history, hunting, trapping, sport hunt guiding, mining, homesteading, sense of place, economy, social organization, land use, transportation, role of women, community, wilderness living, social values



Map 1: Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Though the Alaska parks are essentially wilderness, they are not uninhabited. Communities, Native and others, are integral to the meaning of Alaskan parks. The task is not to recapture some vignette of a past era, but to see the natural and human elements together, and their relationship, as the meaning of the parks (Sax 1990:iii).

CONTEXT

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST) is a land that invites superlatives. The largest unit in America's national park system, it contains 13.2 million acres, making it about six times the size of Yellowstone National Park or around twice the size of Yellowstone, Yosemite, Grand Canyon, Everglades, and Glacier National Parks combined (Map 1). As the country's premier mountain wilderness, it includes parts of four major ranges and nine of the nation's sixteen highest peaks. It also contains North America's largest active shield volcano, its biggest tidewater glacier, its longest interior valley glacier, and its largest piedmont glacier. While conceived primarily as a natural park, WRST contains ample evidence of the region's rich cultural history as well. Archeologists have located prehistoric sites dating back about 10,000 years (Biddle and Reininghaus 2018). The park also holds dozens of important historic properties, including the Kennecott Mines National Landmark, the Chisana Mining Landscape, and the Bremner Mining District (Bleakley 2002).

When many people think of a national park in Alaska, they envision vast expanses of wild country, abundant wildlife, and plenty of space for backcountry adventures without human contact. Driving the roads in and around Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve – the Richardson Highway, the McCarthy Road, the Nabesna Road, the Tok Cut-Off Highway, and the Alaska Highway – you see mountains, boreal forest, rivers and lakes everywhere you look. But hidden behind a thin line of trees along the highway, tucked away down narrow dirt driveways, are people who have settled in the region and found a life for themselves. Most lead quiet unassuming lives patterned on the Athabascan traditions of living off the land in pace with the seasons. For those who came before the national park was created in 1980, the region provided opportunities to hunt, fish, trap and homestead, and provide for a family's needs with minimal regulation. This freedom and the undeveloped landscape attracted many independent-minded pioneers to the area. It was not easy to establish oneself in a remote place with no amenities that has severely cold winters, raging rivers to cross, deep woods and vast bogs to penetrate, and glaciers to navigate. This was especially true in the early days of the gold rush when there were no roads, only trails, and no automobiles, only horse drawn wagons and sleighs and dog teams. Many early adventurers were tested beyond their limits and could not survive this unfriendly country. They returned to the cities from which they had come, ready to spend their remaining years regaling family and friends about their great Alaska adventure. But others were willing and able to stay. Being away from urban life, being their own boss, and forming deep connections with neighbors facing similar hardships helped inspire them to settle in the Wrangell-St. Elias region.

PURPOSE

The primary objective of this project is to develop a written report that documents the culture and traditions of non-Native groups and communities traditionally associated with Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. The purpose is to tell the stories of people who came to the region from elsewhere and stayed to make it their home. These settlers are similar to what is known as *liviers* along the coast of Labrador. Non-Native *liviers* came from England, Scotland, France, Portugal, and other parts of Canada to fish, but made Labrador their home and remained there all year round. In some

cases, *liviers* married local Natives, in others they established their own communities. In contrast, the *floaters* stayed aboard their fishing vessels throughout the season, did not settle onshore, and returned home in the winter. They did not become attached to place the way the *liviers* did.

There are three classes of fishermen in the Labrador fishery: the *liviers*, who live the year round on the Labrador; the *stationers*, who come to the Labrador each season as passengers on the coastal steamers or on the schooners, and return to Newfoundland in the autumn; and the *floaters*, who come from Newfoundland as members of crews of fishing vessels, and who operate with the vessel throughout the season (Mackay 1946:79).

The *liviers* of the Wrangell-St. Elias area established permanent residences in communities such as Chitina, McCarthy, Kenny Lake, Tazlina, Copper Center, Chisana, Gakona, Gulkana, Glennallen, Slana, Nabesna, Tok, Northway, and Yakutat, as well as many spots in between on remote lakes and rivers that were either trail or airplane accessible. These residents turned to the land and their own ingenuity in order to make a living and survive. No matter what time period someone arrived, having the skills and determination to do a variety of jobs were keys to success for remaining in the area. Folks have mined, trapped, operated fox fur farms, run roadhouses or stores, worked for the railroad, hauled freight, flown airplanes, been sport hunting guides, run their own small businesses, sold handmade arts and crafts, or homesteaded a piece of property. Given the limited income that any of these occupations could provide, in order to make ends meet most people work multiple jobs and harvest food from the land as much as possible. While several villages have federally recognized tribal governments, Yakutat is the only community in the area with a local government organized under the framework provided in the State of Alaska Constitution. For some settlers, this lack of formal government has been ideal, while for others “because there is no recognized voice of the non-Native population, they have had little real political input into the decision-making processes affecting the region” (Reckord 1983a:210).

First non-Native contact was along the coast by British explorer George Dixon making it to Yakutat in 1787, followed by the first Russian settlement in Yakutat in 1796 (Deur et al. 2015). This was followed by exploration into the interior, including in 1885 when Lieutenant Henry T. Allen explored up the Copper River and met Ahtna people. In one settlement, known as Taral, Allen comments on how the Ahtna fed his starving party moose and sheep meat, which kept them alive (Allen 1887). In 1891, Geologist Frederick Schwatka traveled to the upper White River. In 1898, US Army Captain W.R. Abercrombie scouted the Valdez-Eagle Trail, which helped more and more prospectors pass through on their way to the Klondike, the Chisana, and the Bremner gold rushes.

The influx of outsiders into the Wrangell-St. Elias area began in earnest during the 1898 Klondike Gold Rush, with the establishment of the “All American Route” from the port of Valdez, across the Valdez Glacier into the Copper River valley and then along the Valdez-Eagle Trail to the Yukon River and Dawson City in the Yukon Territory of Canada. Prior to this, the Ahtna and Upper Tanana Athabascans and the Tlingit of Yakutat had been in the region for thousands of years. Their subsistence hunting and fishing lifestyles required extensive knowledge of the landscape and the animals. They did not have large settlements, but small camps that they moved from place to place following the animals with the seasons. They had names for the landmarks and geographic features that they used to navigate the terrain (Kari and Tuttle 2005). They developed detailed understandings of the places in which they lived and were able to survive and maintain their cultural traditions for thousands of years.

The long history and cultural traditions of the Ahtna, Upper Tanana and Tlingit people associated with Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve have been extensively written about elsewhere,

so will not be repeated here (i.e. McKennan 1959; De Laguna 1969-70, 1972, 1981; Thornton 1995, 2004; Simeone 1995, 2014; Easton n.d.; Mishler and Simeone 2006; Haynes and Simeone 2007; Deur et al. 2015). Suffice it to say, there is a long tradition of Alaska Native inhabitants living off the land and using the resources of the Wrangell-St. Elias and Chugach Mountains and Malaspina Forelands, and of helping newcomer prospectors, trappers, and homesteaders get accustomed to this way of life. There has been crossover between these cultures, both positive and not so positive. Some outsiders have married Natives and become part of the community. Some Natives have been able to find jobs working for non-Natives in such areas as sport hunt guiding, the railroad, roadhouses, the Alaska Road Commission, and the military. But non-Natives also brought disease, destruction of villages, and different ways of life that pressured changes to existing cultural traditions.

As steward of the largest national park in the United States, the National Park Service (NPS) is mandated to document the human heritage of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve as well as protect the natural and cultural resources within its boundaries. “Guided by many federal laws, policies, and regulations, the NPS is required to manage and interpret the landscape with due attention to its human history and to the interests of human communities that still use and revere this unique place into present day” (Deur et al. 2015:2). Guided by this mandate, the NPS has collaborated with park-associated Native communities to provide basic documentation of the nature of their ties to Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. This work has resulted in completion of ethnographic reports for the upper Tanana (Haynes and Simeone 2007) and Ahtna regions (Simeone 2014), which are located in the central and northern parts of the park, and the Tlingit of Yakutat in the southern coastal part of the park (Deur et al. 2015). Oral histories have also been recorded in Chistochina, Chitina, Copper Center, Dot Lake, Healy Lake, Gakona, Glennallen, Gulkana, Kenny Lake, Nabesna, Northway, Slana, Tanacross, Tazlina, Tetlin, Tok, and Yakutat. These interviews are archived at the Oral History Program, Alaska and Polar Regions Collections & Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks and also are available online on the Wrangell-St. Elias Project Jukebox website (www.jukebox.uaf.edu/wrst). While some of these oral histories were conducted with non-Natives, NPS ethnographic documentation of the customs and traditions of non-Natives associated with the park has been lacking.

The NPS defines traditionally associated people as “contemporary park neighbors and ethnic or occupational communities that have been associated with a park for two or more generations (40 years), and whose interests in the park’s resources began before the park’s establishment” (US DOI NPS 2006:70). Often this term is only applied to Native groups (US DOI NPS 1998), however, more recently the NPS has acknowledged that some traditionally associated people can be defined by occupation or lifestyle (Schoepfle 2003:1; Ringsmuth 2016). “Groups have cultures, and ethnographers can study them” (Schoepfle 2003:1). What is most important to remember is that these groups and people have links to living traditions, and they have long-term stakes in the integrity of park resources and the outcomes of management decisions that affect resources associated with them (US DOI NPS 1998).

An Ethnographic Overview and Assessment (EO&A) project is commonly used by the NPS to identify park-associated groups who view park lands and resources as culturally and historically significant. According to the NPS Cultural Resource Management Guidelines (NPS-28), an EO&A involves the following:

This basic report emphasizes the review and analysis of accessible archival and documentary data on park ethnographic resources and the groups who traditionally define such cultural and natural features as significant to their ethnic heritage and cultural viability. Limited interviews and discussions occur with the traditionally associated people in order to supplement and assess the documentary evidence and identify gaps in the available data (US DOI NPS 1998).

In the case of this project, more emphasis was put on the oral history record (archival interviews and newly completed ones) than is typical for EO&As that tend to focus more on the written record of existing ethnographic and historical sources. This EO&A synthesizes the socio-cultural nature of living in and around Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve into a narrative that is meant to be understandable to park managers as well as the general public. Lives and experiences of individuals are highlighted as case studies to provide examples of the culture, traditions, and social organization of each occupational group and how things changed through different time periods. The hope is to shed light on the lesser known aspects of the non-Native customs, traditions, and connections with the park, and demonstrate that these newer settlers have deep ties to the land and its resources and were affected by park establishment in 1980 just as their Native neighbors were. The information presented here is intended to help inform park management decisions, to orient new park staff to the cultural and historical context of the park, and to provide material for possible future interpretive work.

METHODOLOGY

This research began with a systematic review of existing historical and ethnographic literature (published sources, grey literature, and archival collections) about non-Native experiences in the Wrangell-St. Elias region and the creation of an annotated bibliography by David J. Krupa. Themes included small-scale mining, trapping, guided sport hunting, and homesteading in the area. Using this annotated bibliography, Karen Brewster reviewed published sources and delved more deeply into the most relevant ones. She also decided to include discussion of the work of pilots and fox farmers, the role of Natives in some of the key occupational groups, and explore settlers' identities and sense of place, feeling that these were critical aspects of the story that were otherwise not well represented. Her review led to identification of additional sources that have been cited in this report's reference list. She also reviewed the previous oral history interviews conducted for the Wrangell-St. Elias Project Jukebox where non-Natives were discussing their connections to the area, and interviews with trappers conducted in 2010 by Barbara Cellarius, Cultural Anthropologist for Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

Karen Brewster and Barbara Cellarius, along with their colleagues Leslie McCartney (Curator of Oral History, University of Alaska Fairbanks) and Rachel Mason (Senior Cultural Anthropologist, National Park Service, Alaska Region) also conducted a number of new oral history interviews with hunting guides, pilots, homesteaders, and long-time park employees. Barbara Cellarius also helped to initiate, design, and execute the research project. The oral history interviews were conducted at mutually convenient times and locations, usually at the narrator's home. Narrators were told about the project goals and the potential uses of the results, and asked if they wished to participate. Interviews were carried out in accordance with the US Oral History Association's Principles and Best Practices for Oral History (adopted 2009, <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/>, accessed September 28, 2016). All the narrators signed a University of Alaska Gift and Release Agreement indicating their willingness to participate in the research and have their recording preserved and made public at the University of Alaska Oral History Archives. Interviews used open-ended questions and were structured around broad themes of coming to Alaska, settling in the region, activities conducted, details of their specific occupation, why they chose to stay, and changes they have seen.

All of this material has been used as the basis for this narrative about occupational groups traditionally associated with the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve and engaged in the use of park resources. The study also called for an assessment of the completeness of the ethnographic record. Recommendations for areas of future research to address identified data gaps are included in the conclusion. The final product also includes the annotated bibliography of references and locations of relevant collections (Appendix A).

This document is not meant to be the final word on non-Native presence in and around Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. Given that traditionally associated people are defined by the NPS as having multi-generational ties to the park and to the region from before there was a park, the general categories identified in this report are not going to change. However, when viewed with a finer lens, the social and cultural makeup of these groups is a forever changing dynamic with a diversity of people constantly moving in and out of the region. Some stay for long periods, while others just pass through, all leaving their mark on the story of the place. This document covers just one small part of the park's history. As the park and the regional lifestyle continue to change, the uses and perspectives of users will also shift. But it is hoped that this report introduces readers to the concept that local residents are an integral part of the Wrangell-St. Elias landscape, and that by recommending topics for future research it will inspire new opportunities.

CHAPTER 2

ENVIRONMENTAL AND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve is an inhabited wilderness where human activity and diverse cultural values remain integrated with natural processes (US DOI NPS 2010b:13).

ENVIRONMENT

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST) encompasses boreal forest, riverine, coastal and mountain ecosystems. Millions of years of dynamic geological processes have led to the convergence of the Wrangell, St. Elias and Chugach Mountains, and the Alaska Range, and formation of some of the world's tallest mountain peaks. At 18,008 feet tall, Mount St. Elias is the second highest peak in the United States, and a number of other peaks in the Wrangell Mountains are more than 16,000 feet high—higher than any of the peaks in the rest of the country. The complex of mountains in the park contains the nation's largest glacier system, and in 1996 the Nabesna Glacier was called "the world's longest interior valley glacier" (Hunt 1996:10). The region is marked by a network of large river systems originating in the glaciers and ice fields high atop the mountains. The Copper River drainage dominates the landscape in the park's interior. The Copper River begins on Mount Wrangell and flows 280 miles to the Copper River Delta near Cordova. Although not within the park, the delta is a key player in the region's large and diverse ecosystem, containing large areas of intertidal and freshwater wetlands, marshes, tidal channels, sedge meadows, ponds, estuarine mudflats, and delta and barrier islands near the river's mouth. WRST also has more than 122 miles of coastline. Icy and Disenchantment Bays are the only areas of respite in a coastline that claims some of the highest mountains and largest ice fields in North America. The area is also home to North America's largest tidewater glacier, Hubbard Glacier near Yakutat.

Three climatic zones can be found within WRST: maritime, transitional and interior. This climatic variation results in distinct habitat and vegetative zones. In the upland interior (taiga), coniferous forests of white spruce interspersed with stands of deciduous birch and aspen trees, streams, and small lakes are the main features. Discontinuous permafrost impedes tree growth in many areas and restricts drainage in the lowlands, thus accounting for the abundance of lakes and wetlands in some locations. Muskeg, or spindly black spruce trees surrounded by large expanses of mosses, grasses, and shrubs, is prevalent in these poorly drained areas. Willow and alder thickets also are distinctive in river corridors and in areas burned by fires. At the higher elevations, the landscape is dominated by rocky outcroppings, permanent snow fields, and alpine tundra with low-growing shrubs like dwarf birch and willow, and abundant wildflowers in the spring. The coastal zone is comprised of rocky shorelines, wetlands, tidewater glaciers, and eventually around Yakutat the beginning of the southern coastal rainforest. Each of these ecosystems supports abundant wildlife including birds (shorebirds, swans, geese, ducks, warblers, thrushes, sparrows, rock ptarmigan, spruce grouse, great horned owls, northern hawk owls, woodpeckers, gray jays, ravens, black billed magpies, American robins, murrelets, and dark eyed juncos), fish (lake, cutthroat and rainbow/steelhead trout; sockeye, coho, Chinook, and humpback salmon; burbot; and round whitefish), land mammals (Dall sheep, mountain goats, moose, caribou, wolves, bison, black and brown bears, lynx, wolverines, beavers, martens, porcupines, fox, coyotes, marmots, river otters, ground squirrels, pikas and voles), and marine mammals (sea lions, harbor seals, sea otters, porpoises and whales). Each of these regions also hosts a wide variety of edible plants and berries.¹

The Wrangell and St. Elias Mountains and Malaspina Forelands represent some of the most rugged and dynamic landscapes anywhere in the world, having been subject to major tectonic shifts,



View of Kennicott Glacier and Kennicott River, September 2016. Photo by Karen Brewster.

glaciations and deglaciations, high magnitude floods, vegetative successions and alterations, and other dramatic environmental changes. This dynamic landscape is part of the traditional homeland of many Alaska Native people, who have survived for generations by relying upon the abundant plant and animal resources that the land provides.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

No one knows for sure when humans first reached interior Alaska, but archeologists have found artifacts at prehistoric sites along the middle Tanana River near Delta Junction that indicate human habitation there as early as 13,000 years ago (Potter 2016; Potter et al. 2011), and at Dry Creek and Healy Lake at least 11,000 years ago (Cook 1989; Bleakley 2002). As glacial ice retreated, these or similar people eventually entered the Wrangell Mountains. Archeologists have located prehistoric sites within park boundaries dating back about 10,000 years (Biddle and Reininghaus 2018). Archeological evidence has dated occupation at Ptarmigan Lake to 2500 to 2700 BP (Patterson 2008), however, direct ties between the modern and historic Ahtna and Upper Tanana and their ancestors showing continuous presence in the middle Copper Basin has only been archeologically established for the past 1,000 or so years (Bleakley 2002:1).

Game in the region was never plentiful enough to support large concentrations of people, so the Native population remained small and scattered. Most Ahtna villages contained twenty to thirty members of a familial clan and were situated where a major tributary entered the Copper River.

Upper Tanana Indians settled the northern edge of the Wrangell Mountains to the east of Batzulnetas, establishing several small villages along the Nabesna and Chisana Rivers (Ibid).

During the full history of human occupation of what is now Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, the southern portion has been a rapidly changing landscape. During the “Little Ice Age,” Yakutat Bay was fully concealed by ice, the front of the glacier running from modern Yakutat to Point Manby—its maximum advance at roughly AD 1100. The terminal moraine of that glacier still forms a submarine ridge across the mouth of Yakutat Bay, arcing to Point Manby. Physical evidence of early occupation of Yakutat Bay is understandably limited due to the subsequent advance and retreat of the vast glacier that occupied the entire basin, destroying all evidence of past human occupation. Memories of the Little Ice Age, the depopulation of the coast and its reoccupation over time, are all kept alive in the oral and ritual traditions of Yakutat Tlingit (Cruikshank 2005; Deur et al. 2015:52-53). In the Yakutat region prior to contact with Euro-Americans, the Tlingit and the Proto-Athabascan-speaking Eyak were in the process of melding two distinct cultures creating the Yakutat Tlingit, combining both Athabascan and Tlingit identities with Tlingit language and largely Tlingit social organization. The intersection and ultimate integration of these two groups is the result of a northward expansion by the Tlingit into the Yakutat area, which had previously been settled by southerly migrating Eyak. The Tlingit pressed northward from Dry Bay, expanding into the Yakutat region and ultimately occupying the coast as far as Cape Yakataga (Ibid:23). Most of those who used the present park lived around Yakutat Bay (Bleakley 2002:2).

Europeans first approached the Wrangell-St. Elias region in 1741 when Vitus Bering landed at Kayak Island, about thirty miles southeast of the Copper River Delta. In the early 1780s, Russian fur traders traveled from their bases on the Aleutian Islands, Kodiak Island, and the Kenai Peninsula along the southern coast of Alaska’s mainland and noticed the huge Copper River. The first written record of the drainage appears in the journal of Russian navigator Potap K. Zaikov, who visited Prince William Sound in 1783. The earliest historic record of travel on the Copper River is the journal and map of Russian geologist Dmitrii Tarkhanov’s 1796 trip. In 1797, he stayed for several months in the vicinity of Chitina, mainly at an Ahtna village at the mouth of Fox Creek (Kari and Tuttle 2005:4). In 1793, the Russians established a post on Hinchinbrook Island, about twenty miles southwest of the Copper River Delta. Officially called Konstantinavsky Redoubt but known as Nuchek, this served as the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company’s regional headquarters, and the majority of Russian forays into the Copper Basin began here (Bleakley 2002:2-3). In 1798, Semyen Potochkin, who was conducting a census of local inhabitants, reached the mouth of the Chitina River and wintered at the Ahtna village of Taral, thereby becoming the first European known to have ascended the lower Copper River completely (Ibid:3). The Ahtna, however, objected to these increasing Russian incursions, and defended themselves vehemently, usually ending in Russian deaths (Ibid:3). In 1819, after the collapse of the sea otter trade led Russians to search for other furs, Afanasii Klimovskii was sent to explore the Copper Basin, reaching as far as the Gakona River. He established a trading post called Mednovshaya Odinochka (Copper Fort) near Taral, which endured, off and on, for the next thirty years. The Russian American Company tried to explore the rest of the Copper Basin in 1847-1848, with Ruf Serebrennikov leading an expedition to traverse from the Copper to the Yukon River. All were killed by the upper Ahtna, probably at or near the village of Batzulnetas. The Russians made no further efforts to explore the region (Ibid:4).

The people of Yakutat experienced similar difficulties with early European contact. Not only were their society and culture affected, but it transformed the community’s relationships with the land now within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (Deur et al. 2015:100). Initially, the sea otter colonies of the Yakutat coastline captured the attention of fur traders from Russia, Spain, and England. The first documented European landfall in the Yakutat area occurred in May of 1787, when the British ship *Queen Charlotte*, under the command of George Dixon, arrived at Point Mulgrave on

Yakutat Bay, and spent two weeks anchored opposite the village of Yakutat trading with the residents (Ibid:105). The first Russian explorer to record detailed accounts of interaction with Yakutat Tlingit was fur trader Gerasim Grigoriev Izmailov in 1788 (Ibid:102). Formal Russian settlement of the Yakutat area began in 1796, when a fort was constructed at Yakutat, and the colony of Novo Rossiysk was established. After years of poor relationships between the Russians and the Tlingit, the local Tlingit attacked the colony in the summer of 1805 and completely destroyed it.

George Holt was the first American known to have ascended the lower Copper River, reaching the mouth of the Chitina River in 1882. With discovery of gold in Alaska and the Yukon Territory of Canada, more and more men headed into the Copper River valley region for prospecting. The American government worried about the potential for conflict between the undisciplined miners and Alaska's Native population, so sent several US Army expeditions to reconnoiter the region. Lieutenant William R. Abercrombie led a party in 1884 and laid the path across the Valdez Glacier for an alternative overland route to the Yukon and Klondike gold fields (Abercrombie 1900a and 1900b). In 1885, Lieutenant Henry T. Allen got farther than Abercrombie and explored both the Chitina River and the Copper River nearly to its headwaters, eventually making it all the way to the Tanana and Yukon Rivers (Allen 1887). Explorers also probed the area coming in from the north. Frederick Schwatka's 1891 expedition traversed overland from the Yukon River to the upper White River, crossed Skolai Pass, and descended the Nizina, Chitina, and Copper Rivers (Schwatka 1900).

Several groups investigated the southern edge of the St. Elias Mountains during this period as well. In 1886, a party led by Frederick Schwatka attempted to reach the summit of Mount St. Elias. They approached by sea, landing at the mouth of the Yaktse River just east of Icy Bay. They failed to reach the summit, but they explored the lower portion of the Tyndall Glacier before returning to the coast (Schwatka 1891). In 1888, another expedition, led by Englishman Harold W. Topham, also attempted to climb Mount St. Elias from Icy Bay. Even with the assistance of Tlingit from Yakutat as guides, boat paddlers, and packers, the expedition failed (Williams 1889). In the early 1900s, the black sand along the Yakutat coastline was recognized for containing deposits of heavy minerals, and miners rushed in. This was the first significant non-Native presence in Yakutat since the Russians were expelled (Deur et al. 2015:119). By 1888, the Swedish Evangelical Covenant Church arrived in Yakutat. The church, along with the Situk River fishery, cannery and Yakutat and Southern Railroad, reshaped community life until roughly 1930 (Ibid:119-121; Ehrlander 2014).

By the turn of the 20th century, the lifestyles and economic activities of both Native and non-Native residents of the Wrangell-St. Elias area began to change. Although this report focuses on the non-Native experience, it is necessary to mention some of the changes within the Native community because it affected the overall regional economy and way of life. The traditional Native hunting and gathering culture was transforming into what Wolfe (2000) calls "a mixed, subsistence-market economy." In this system, households combine jobs with subsistence, and invest a portion of their income into technology used to harvest wild foods. The same was happening in non-Native households who previously relied more on hunting and trapping were now more interested in or required to earn wages to pay for supplies and amenities that were previously unavailable.

After the Klondike Gold Rush subsided, gold was discovered in 1913 in Chisana, near the northern edge of the Wrangell Mountains. A small rush occurred, creating a reason for independent prospectors to stay in the region (Bleakley 2007). Others came as employees of the larger mines, such as Kennecott Copper Mine, or the Copper River and Northwestern Railway (CR&NW) that connected Kennecott, McCarthy, Chitina and Cordova. Nearly \$200 million worth of copper was processed during the mine's lifetime (1911-1938), and at the peak of operation, approximately 300 people worked in the mill town and 200-300 in the mines (US DOI NPS n.d.a). The railroad was a main transportation corridor making it easier for people and supplies to get into the interior and the copper ore back out to the coast for loading onto ships. This began a slowly increasing migration of non-Natives to the



Doc Billum and family at Copper River ferry, 1923. Merl Lavoy, John Urban Collection; Anchorage Museum, B1964.001.457.

area, not only as prospectors, but as trappers, traders, and homesteaders, or in support roles such as hauling mail and freight first by dog team and then by airplane, operating roadhouses, or being market hunters or guides. By the 1920s and 1930, there was a substantial non-Native population in the region, who had generally good relations with their Ahtna and Upper Tanana neighbors who were trying to continue their non-sedentary pattern of seasonal subsistence. Eventually, more and more of the Native population were pulled into village settlements by missionaries, for school for their children, or for jobs.

The 1930s to the 1950s were a period of significant in-migration of non-Natives to the Wrangell-St. Elias area. They saw job opportunities and the chance to carve out a life in their own little piece of Alaska. There was work with the Alaska Road Commission building and improving roads and bridges, or operating heavy equipment at mine sites. Later, there were opportunities constructing the Alaska Highway and the various military airfields and associated structures. By the end of World War II in 1945, the local society and economy had made an almost complete shift away from the old seasonal land-based way of life. Completed in 1942, the Alaska Highway cemented this centralization (Cole et al. 1992). It became the main transportation and communication artery for the Upper Tanana region by providing access to food, medical care, jobs, schools, other villages, and the urban centers of Fairbanks and Anchorage. The airports at Tanacross and Northway extended their network of communication, while Tok Junction, which had originated as a highway construction camp, became the regional center for this northern area (Haynes and Simeone 2007:14-15). With completion of the Glenn Highway during World War II, Glennallen with its airstrip in Gulkana and location at the cross-roads with the 1920s era Richardson Highway became a similar hub for the Copper Basin communities. The airfield at Gulkana was quite a large facility, as it included runways, an air operations center, a communications and radio facility, a motor repair shop, a hospital, and five barracks to house several hundred troops (Ringsmuth 2012a:63).



Fred Ahrens, McCarthy Section Foreman for the CR&NW Railroad, circa 1920. Courtesy of Dick Anderson.

Construction of airstrips at Gulkana and Northway displaced Natives from their homes with little or no compensation and destroyed villages such as Dry Creek near Glennallen (Ringsmuth 2012a:64-65). The influx of soldiers and a regular stream of airplanes flying in and out led to rapid social and cultural change among the Native population in particular, but also to the whole region (Reckord 1983b; Haycox 1989; and Haynes and Simeone 2007). Similar to earlier periods, Natives were impacted by the ravages of infectious disease introduced by soldiers and construction workers, especially in settlements along the Alaska Highway (Cruikshank 1985; Simeone 1992; Haynes and Simeone 2007:118; Wilson 2008). Lavell Wilson describes the impacts he witnessed from the military being around Northway in the 1940s and 1950s:

Northway had a big Army contingent there at the airport, so they got subjected to a lot more, a lot quicker than like Tetlin and places like that. Because there was a lot of Army there, a lot of facilities, you know, they weren't always welcomed. There was a lot of animosity at some parts against anybody that wasn't white. Northway got subjected to it a little worse. In some ways it was better for them, I guess, it brought them up quicker, but in some ways it was worse. They got introduced to tobacco and alcohol, and stuff like that, which they weren't prepared for by any means. But I don't know the single biggest impact, that'd be hard to say. You know, probably just the impact on their culture. All of the sudden they're supposed to be integrated into another culture.

That don't take place overnight, you know. Religion, you know, preachers showed up. And not only diseases like diphtheria and smallpox and that, but venereal disease. All them young G.I.'s [sic] and all them young Native girls. You know, they were plying them with booze and gifts and everything. It's just the way it happens. All them G.I.'s [sic] chasing all them girls, I mean there had to be an impact there. Right away you start getting half-breed kids, and nobody was prepared to handle that particularly. And, of course, as soon as the Army got transferred a lot of the kids were left here. They weren't necessarily taken with them like now.

The military didn't pay much attention to it. The only thing the military did, they wouldn't let the black soldiers go into any of the villages or associate with any of them. In fact they interviewed one of the elders in Mentasta years ago, asking him about the first white men he saw, and he said well he'd heard a few white man had been through down there, but the first white men he really saw were black (Wilson 2008).

Some men who worked on the highway and airfield construction chose to stay on after they were discharged, making homes for themselves in Northway, Tok or in the Glennallen area. In addition, soldiers from Anchorage and Fairbanks came to the Copper Basin and the Wrangell and Chugach Mountains to enjoy the recreational and hunting opportunities (Reckord 1983b:71-72; Haycox 1989; and Ringsmuth 2012a:63). The military also brought in advancements in technology that eventually led to improved infrastructure, and introduction of a more modern way of life.

The Yakutat area similarly saw a significant military presence during World War II because of the US government's concern about impacts from the Japanese invasion of the Aleutian Islands. The Yakutat Air Base was constructed in 1940, was used as a staging area and stopover point throughout the war, and led to establishment of the current Yakutat airport. There were also fortified facilities and roughly 10,000 troops stationed there, which greatly impacted the community. According to Deur, in addition to the airfield, Yakutat was fortified with army and naval facilities, including two cannons at Canon Beach that were part of a larger complex of fortifications on the bluffs along the shoreline facing the mouth of Yakutat Bay. The military also constructed a series of roads and bridges in and around Yakutat that are believed to have impacted subsistence fishing. In addition, a Coast Guard station was constructed atop a subsistence strawberry patch (Deur et al. 2015:132). Like the other parts of the Wrangell-St. Elias area, Native residents were relocated from outlying areas, such as Dry Bay, to the main community of Yakutat. Although in Yakutat this was done for purported public safety reasons and in the Upper Tanana and Copper River basin the movement into villages was related to being closer to schools and other services, they both resulted in significant changes to traditional subsistence and cultural practices, and people's health as they shifted to more sedentary lives and ate less of their traditional foods (Deur et al. 2015:130-134).

By the 1950s, sport hunting had become a popular and more affordable activity, so it provided economic opportunity for people in the Wrangell-St. Elias area to work as guides or pilots. In Yakutat, the 1950s and 1960s were a period dominated by commercial fishing for both Natives and non-Natives, as well as some guided sport hunting and fishing, and logging.

At first, Alaska becoming a state in 1959 had little effect on the lifestyle in the Wrangell-St. Elias area. Well into the 1960s and 1970s, people enjoyed the freedom of living in a remote place away from the rules and regulations of government, and appreciated the beauty of the country and the opportunity to live close to the land. This was to change in later years as regulations were established, especially for things like hunting, guiding, and homesteading.

Further economic, political, and social change came to the area with passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971 that established the Ahtna, Doyon, and Sealaska regional Native corporations. Construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline from 1975 to 1977 brought in a

temporary influx of high paying jobs that resulted in a change of lifestyle for many, especially in the Copper River basin. Some people shifted away from subsistence because they were making enough money in a job to buy food for their families, or because they no longer had time while working a full-time job with long hours. More money in people's pockets meant purchases of snowmachines, all-terrain vehicles, boats, trucks and cars. Being able to save money meant people could afford to build new homes and furnish them with the latest appliances and televisions. The newfound wealth also left a negative mark on the region with substance abuse, domestic violence, and broken families (Reckord 1979, 1983a).

In 1983, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) offered homestead sites along the Nabesna Road in the North Slana Settlement area and in 1987 the state offered lots for sale in the Fireweed Mountain Subdivision near McCarthy, both of which brought an influx of newcomers. Many were "back to the landers" wanting to escape the confines and materialism of urbanized and socially mainstream places in what Alaskans commonly refer to as the Lower 48 states or "Outside." In McCarthy, they found a community of like-minded folks, while in Slana some found isolation and opposition from old-timers who did not support their approach to homesteading (Defenderfer and Walkinshaw 1981; Brice 1998).

PARK FORMATION

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve was formally established in 1980 under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), but efforts to preserve the scenery and resources of the area began long before. The US Forest Service (USFS) first suggested protecting the region in 1908, but there was little response until 1937, when Washington Senator Lewis Schwellenback and Alaska's nonvoting congressional delegate, Anthony Dimond, proposed an international park. Ernest Gruening, then director of the Interior Department's Division of Territories and Island Possessions, advanced that effort the following year by asking the National Park Service to create a new unit. In promoting his plan, Gruening argued that the Wrangell Mountains were not only the most spectacular mountains in Alaska, but some of the most beautiful in the world. Interior Secretary Harold L. Ickes supported Gruening's proposal and asked President Franklin D. Roosevelt to declare it a park. Given that it was the lead up to World War II, when the country was focused on national defense and the build-up of its military, the president denied Ickes's request (Bleakley 2002:11-12).

The idea did not resurface until 1966 when Alaska's Senator Gruening suggested creation of a "National Park Highway." Nothing came of the idea other than it caused several agencies to take a fresh look at the Wrangell Mountains. For example, in 1968, the BLM recommended that most of the Copper Basin be retained by the federal government because of its outstanding qualities (Ibid:13-14). In 1969, Secretary of the Interior Walter Hickel tried to get a 10.5 million-acre "Wrangell Mountain Scenic Area" established under BLM's multi-use management regime, but with no success. In 1978, while ANILCA legislation was being negotiated in Congress, President Jimmy Carter established a 10,950,000-acre Wrangell-St. Elias National Monument as a way to prevent mineral exploration and state land selection, and permanently protect the area.

Eventually, ANILCA was signed into law in December 1980, and the boundaries were set for the 8,147,000-acre Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and 4,171,000-acre Wrangell-St. Elias National Preserve, making it the largest park in the United States.² National preserves were to be administered in the same manner as national parks except that sport hunting was allowed in the preserve but not on park lands. In drawing the boundary between the park and preserve, ANILCA tried to balance the interests of several competing user groups. Some of the most bitter arguments focused on future access to Dall sheep, a species for which the Wrangell and St. Elias Mountains were famous. "ANILCA placed WRST's borders in such a way as to leave about 60 percent of the sheep in the preserve, and therefore available for sport hunting" (Bleakley 2002:28). ANILCA also mandated that management

be consistent with conservation of healthy wildlife populations and allow rural residents who were dependent upon subsistence resources to continue to harvest them within the park.³ This included ensuring access for residents of Yakutat to parklands for subsistence hunting and commercial fishing. In 1979, Wrangell-St. Elias National Monument and Kluane National Park in Canada were designated as a World Heritage Site. It was then expanded in 1992 to include Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, and in 1994 Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Park was added (Bleakley 2002).⁴

Early relations between the National Park Service in Alaska and adjoining communities were often less than friendly (Catton 1997). This was certainly true in the Wrangell-St. Elias area where “much of this hostility stemmed from 1971 when ANCSA reallocated local land, disrupting traditional lifestyles and leaving many residents feeling victimized by the process. Federal efforts to create a national park in the region only increased that perception” (Bleakley 2002:39). In some places, there were overt statements against the NPS, such as a sign posted at the Tazlina Trading Post that read: “We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone. Due to our beliefs in freedom we prefer not to serve the National Park Service” (Defenderfer and Walkinshaw 1981:57). In other places, the resistance was more subtle and sometimes a bit more dangerous, such as the sabotage of an NPS airplane at the Yakutat airport or burning of another plane at the Tazlina Glacier Lodge (Bleakley 2002:40 & 42). During this period, local Ahtna leaders generally supported the idea of the national park. They felt assured that their subsistence uses would be protected. They saw the potential for local jobs that could provide desperately needed income. And they hoped to participate in road and trail construction, help develop visitor centers, and manage wildlife (Ibid:40-41).

In reality, the establishment of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve brought few immediate changes. In the interests of improving community relations, park staff kept a low profile and did little in terms of direct management. Eventually, the park became more established and regulations started to be enforced. This created strife with some locals about things like permitting, access, subsistence, hunting, mining, and concessions, but overall relations improved as park staff worked more with locals. Communities began to see the benefits of having a national park nearby. Jon Jarvis, WRST superintendent from 1994 to 2000, did much to advance this notion of collaboration. He believed that the future of the park and the communities were “tied together, that they shared common goals, and that only by working together could they enhance park values, protect local lifestyles, promote local employment, and grow the local economy” (Ibid:47).

MAKING A LIFE

For the myriad people who have come from elsewhere to settle in and around what is now Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, one of the driving forces behind their decision to stay was enjoying the landscape and way of life and finding a way to make a living. For many, it started with finding a piece of property they loved and building a home. Some also ran businesses from these locations, such as lodges, roadhouses, air taxi services, guiding businesses, or farms. For long-time residents, their identities are now shaped by the place. They have created their own way of life based upon living off the land, working a mixture of jobs, and being strongly committed to having the right to live as freely as possible far from the centers of government and regulations. They consider themselves as much a part of the landscape and culture as the Native residents whose ancestors have been here for generations and whose traditions and values are directly linked to the places, the seasons, and the wildlife.

Since Lt. Henry Allen explored the region in 1885, miners and homesteaders supplemented their livelihood by fishing, hunting and trapping. Within three distinct periods, non-natives have used the Wrangells. For example, following the early miners, numerous hunters and trappers covered the region with trap lines following

World War II. By 1972, most non-native subsistence users dominated the Chitina Valley, living near McCarthy, May and Dan Creeks, and along the Nabesna Road. Unlike the early miners and trappers, the most recent non-native subsistence users preferred to adhere to the 1960s counter-cultural values--such as the “back to nature” philosophy--which was decidedly anti-regulation, anti-urban, and primal oriented. Modern subsistence, in other words, inferred the search for personal freedom and the detachment from modern society (Lappen 1984:117).

The people who stayed in the area are resilient, independent, and tough. They have had to survive intense cold, possible starvation, and loneliness. As McGuire wrote in 1921 regarding life on the Alaska-Yukon borderlands, “It takes men of strong courage and stout limb to live the sourdough’s life, but years of participation in this work builds up the constitution, hardens the muscles, and makes men of iron out of, sometimes, the most debilitated specimens of humanity” (McGuire 1921:212). They have lived with few amenities, and have learned to hunt, fish, trap, cut firewood, build log homes, drive a dog team or snowmachine, and find their way on trails through difficult and isolated terrain. They are hard workers who have been willing to do anything to make enough money to be able to stay. They have been savvy at seeing opportunities that perhaps others did not and filling a niche, being willing to jump into something new, and been creative at combining what others might not see as related occupations. Terry Haynes describes the older non-Natives in his 1984 PhD dissertation on rural aging in the upper Tanana region as follows:

They value independence, privacy, self-reliance, and reciprocity. They like living in the area because there are not so many rules and regulations. They like to hunt and fish and be outdoors. As they say, “You’re pretty much free to do what you want” (Haynes 1984:188).

ACCESS

In addition to having the right character and commitment to place, access to the resources you needed to survive was another key factor for leading a successful life in the Wrangell Mountain area (Haynes and Walker 1995). Some form of transportation was necessary for subsistence or guided hunting for moose, caribou or sheep. To occupy a mining claim, you had to be able to transport out any ore discovered, just as you needed to bring out fur from your trapline or bring in supplies and equipment to a farm homestead or a remote cabin. Therefore, the history of transportation in the region helps us understand the story of its settlement.

As mentioned previously, passage through the area as early as the mid-1800s was by trail, either on foot in the summer or by dog team in the frozen winter months, or by boat along the extensive interconnected system of creeks, streams, rivers, and lakes. With the establishment of the Copper River and Northwestern Railway in 1911 running from Cordova to Chitina and on to the copper mine at Kennecott, access to parts of the Copper River valley became significantly easier. Someone could arrive in Cordova by steamship from Seattle, spend the night ashore, and be in Kennecott or McCarthy the next day. This was a far cry from the previous arduous journey early prospectors took on the trail across the glacier from Valdez to the raging upper Klutina River that took weeks to accomplish and where many lost their lives. However, access into the mountains past the communities of Chitina, McCarthy or Kennecott still required a long hike, often carrying heavy packs of supplies, or if you were lucky a dog team ride from a local hunter or one of the freight or mail carriers making their regular deliveries to Chisana or Nabesna.

Access into and around the region was facilitated by the Valdez to Eagle Trail built by the US Army in 1898 to provide an “all-American” route to the Klondike gold fields,⁵ development of the

Washington Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System (WAMCATS) line in 1901/1902 that opened up previously wooded or brushy terrain into a clear travel corridor (Blanchard 2010), and the Alaska Road Commission's construction of "roads" in the 1910s and 1920s, which often were little more than wide trails. However, introduction of the airplane in the 1930s was revolutionary for folks living in the Wrangell-St. Elias area. Airplanes provided quick and easier access to remote areas of the backcountry. "Not only were airplanes a vital link for communities choosing to live at the edge of the managed world, but in terms of function and distinctiveness, airplanes provided the essential cohesive quality that gave the Wrangell Mountain communities their frontier identity" (Ringsmuth 2015:172). Well-known Alaskan bush pilots like Charles "Harold" Gillam, Bob Reeve, Merritt "Kirk" Kirkpatrick, and Merle "Mudhole" Smith started small air services either based out of the railroad town of Chitina or the port towns of Cordova and Valdez with the intention of flying in supplies and mail to the mines and miners (Ringsmuth 2015).⁶ While these men pioneered routes and made travel easier around the Copper River valley and surrounding mountains, they are not solely identified with the area. They went on to be accomplished aviators in other parts of Alaska with legacies that reach far and wide (Ibid).

Flying in the Wrangell and Chugach Mountains may have first developed as a way to serve the miners in Chisana, McCarthy, Nabesna, and Bremner, where rudimentary airstrips were built, but aviation also was critical for supplying miners at places like May Creek, Dan Creek, Glacier Creek, the *Mother Lode* mine on the east side of Bonanza Ridge, the *Green Butte* mine on McCarthy Creek, the *Valdez* mine on a tributary of the Kuskulana River, as well as smaller claims scattered along the creeks and rivers. Pilots landed on gravel bars at these less-developed mines or on the bare tundra, but by the 1950s, a demand for improved access into the mountains for sport sheep hunting led to construction of rustic airstrips in some pretty remote spots (Ringsmuth 2012a, 2015).

With the onset of World War II and Alaska's sudden strategic importance, the US military constructed a number of large airfields in the region at Yakutat, Northway, Nabesna, and Gulkana. The old airstrip at the Nabesna Mine (later named Reeve Field in honor of Bob Reeve who had brushed out the original strip) was important because it was improved to a 6,000 foot runway and 2,000 foot cross-strip in order to be used as the departure point for flying construction supplies to build the Northway airfield in 1941 (Ringsmuth 2012a:59). The Northway airfield was a main refueling stop for airplanes flying between Alaska and the main part of the United States, in particular as part of the Lend-Lease program where US planes were sent to the Soviet Union via Alaska.

While these large airfields were strategically important, local private pilots, outfitters, and charter companies did not have access to them. These small-scale pilots continued to rely on floatplanes or wheeled or ski planes landing on gravel bars, rustic strips, or snow-covered glaciers. In some cases, the impact of this airfield construction was especially negative for Natives. Whether it was Yakutat, Northway or Gulkana, the military presence brought more and more non-Natives to the region, which often meant more competition for game, and destruction of resources by outsiders with a different value system. The familiar story of non-Natives bringing alcohol and disease to Native communities was a recurring theme as well (Reckord 1983b; Haycox 1989; and Haynes and Simeone 2007). The socio-cultural situation in the region changed from Natives having control over their traditional lands and lifestyles to that of non-Natives being in positions of power and in some cases treating Native residents as second-class citizens.

Their lands were invaded, homes destroyed, game that was once hunted for food fled to less populated territory. They endured and adapted but were never recognized as actual heroes. Instead, the U.S. Army's treatment of Alaska Natives living in the way of war reduced them to a status similar to refugees (Ringsmuth 2012a:63).



First plane landing in Yakutat, April 16, 1931. Pilot Bob Ellis took townspeople for rides in the floatplane. Alaska State Library, Kayamori Photograph Collection, ASL-P55-290.

Increased aviation also made positive contributions to life in the area. For some local pilots of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s who used airplanes for transporting sport hunting clients like Bud Conkle or Bill Ellis, or developed glacier landing techniques like Jack Wilson, aviation provided a livelihood that would not have otherwise been possible. Flying was the best way to get to some of the more remote areas, whether for hunting, mining, or recreation. These men were much more connected to their location compared to the likes of Reeve or Kirkpatrick who were temporary residents and went on to fly in other parts of Alaska. First and foremost, they considered themselves Wrangell-St. Elias area mountain pilots. Even those who led polar bear hunting trips in northern Alaska in the 1950s and 1960s, like Wilson, Conkle, Ellis, and Cleo McMahan, they always returned home to the Wrangell-St. Elias area. They flew out of small airfields at Nabesna, Slana, Gulkana, Gakona, Chitina, and McCarthy or from their own backyards. They took off and landed on remote lakes with squirrely cross-winds. They spent years of their lives flying the terrain and were experts at sussing out wind and weather conditions and finding safe landing places. They loved the country, and flying was their way of deepening their understanding of it and feeling a part of the wildness. There were so few roads in Alaska during this time that an airplane was really the only way to get to some of these previously inaccessible places. It was an adventurer's dream (Wilson 1988; Conkle and Rearden 1990; Conkle

and Rearden 1991; C. & L. Ellis 1993; K. Ellis 1993; McMahan 1993; Conkle 1997, 2000; Pollen 2000; Ringsmuth 2012a; and Knutson 2016).

Although this report does not contain a specific section on aviation as an occupational group in and of itself, pilots have had a long association with what was to become Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. Therefore, there is discussion of the importance of aviation for opening up the country and some of the key pilots who made the area their home. These are critical elements in the overall story of the non-Native history of the region.

While less about local access, tourism was another type of activity that increased with aviation. “By the end of the 1950s, tourists began to desire an experience that offered more than superior hunting and fishing. This new postwar tourist appreciated Alaska’s pristine wilderness – a luxury quickly disappearing on America’s new industrial, technological and progressive frontiers” (Ringsmuth 2012a:80). Employment rose within both the aviation and tourism industries in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, and there was an increase in the number of people in the area at any given time. In 1955, Merle Smith started flying tourists from Cordova to Kennecott/McCarthy for an “Old West” type tour focused on the ghost town and mining history (Janson 1981; Ringsmuth 2012a:83-84; Smith 2016). The first year of running his “Sourdough Tours,” Smith hauled in over 900 passengers (Ringsmuth 2012a:85).

Changes in hunting rules after park establishment brought fewer sport hunters to the area, so the hunting guide pilots had to find new ways to make a living. Luckily, around the same time, the environmental movement of the 1970s and 1980s gained momentum and people were eager for wilderness experiences, and the Wrangell-St. Elias backcountry became a popular destination. The most successful pilots took advantage of this opportunity and transitioned from flying hunters to transporting non-consumptive recreational users, such as wilderness adventurers, photographers, and mountain climbers. With establishment of McCarthy Air in 1988, pilot and former hunting guide Gary Green was one of the first to specifically cater to this type of non-consumptive tourism and recreation in the Wrangell-St. Elias area (Ringsmuth 2015:186). Kelly Bay, who established Wrangell Mountain Air out of McCarthy in 1992, the Claus family with Ultima Thule Lodge near the terminus of Chitina Glacier, and Cole and Kirk Ellis out of Devil’s Mountain Lodge in Nabesna, who previously flew in hunters, followed in Green’s footsteps, understanding that the continued success of their businesses relied upon diversification of client types. The Ultima Thule Lodge’s website explains, “Airplanes are the physical expression of the love of wilderness” (Ultima Thule Lodge 2016). It was still all about access into the Wrangell Mountains, it was just perhaps for different purposes – photography or backpacking by visitors instead of hunting or mining.

The ultimate case for aviation as a critical factor in access to subsistence resources came from the Malaspina Forelands part of what is now Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (McNeary 1978). In 1980, during a public hearing regarding subsistence in the newly established park, Byron Mallott, Tlingit mayor of Yakutat, testified that the people of Yakutat traditionally and customarily hunted on the Malaspina Forelands and for a long time had been using aircraft for access for subsistence. He explained that this was necessary because the region’s harsh and unpredictable weather often made it impossible to make the open water boat crossing across the Gulf of Alaska that was required to get from Yakutat to Icy Bay (US Congress 1979:169; US Congressional Record 1980; Norris 2002:134-135; Bleakley 2002:107; Ringsmuth 2015:184). Based on this evidence, special regulations were issued that allow Yakutat residents to continue this customary practice of using airplanes to access these traditional subsistence grounds (36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 13.1902(c); Norris 2002:135). The use of airplanes for subsistence continues to be prohibited elsewhere in the park.

Aviation made remote parts of the Wrangell-St. Elias region more accessible, thereby making it a more inviting place to explore and live. However, the limited road system in the area also has been

a key factor influencing the regional lifestyle. In 1910, the Alaska Road Commission upgraded the primitive Valdez to Eagle Trail to a wagon road and the first car drove on it in 1913. In the 1920s, the rise of motorized travel led to the road being upgraded to automobile standards. While the Richardson Highway did not do a lot for access into the heart of the Wrangell Mountains, it was the main transportation route between Valdez and Fairbanks, thereby making it easier for people to at least get to the general vicinity. In 1934, a road was constructed to the Nabesna River for access to the Nabesna Gold Mine, which operated from 1925 to 1945. This facilitated overall transportation into the area with local residents using the road to get closer to subsistence hunting grounds and newer miners around Chisana being able to charter a shorter airplane flight from Reeve Field in Nabesna for hauling equipment and supplies. After the Copper River and Northwestern Railway ceased operation in 1938 with closure of the Kennecott Mine, access into the McCarthy side of the range was once again limited to airplanes, which made it harder and more expensive to get there. Despite road and airplane access, the Wrangell-St. Elias area remained relatively isolated until World War II when the Alaska and Glenn Highways were constructed. This connected Alaska with the rest of the United States, but also established a reliable road link between the Wrangell-St. Elias, Upper Tanana and Copper Basin areas to Anchorage. With this improved and expanded network of roadways and Americans' love affair with the automobile after the war, more and more newcomers came to the region and settled. These perimeter roads provided residents the means for easy travel to town for supplies, to roadhouses or neighbors' houses for socializing or assistance, or to trailheads for access to hunting and trapping in the vast wilderness. With paving of the Richardson Highway in 1975, road travel became even more appealing.

The 60-mile McCarthy Road from Chitina to McCarthy opened to the public in 1971 when the State of Alaska constructed a new bridge over the Copper River, and the former CR&NW rail bed was modified into a road by backfilling with gravel over the remaining wooden railroad ties. Along with the 42-mile Nabesna Road in the north, these two roads are the only ground-based arteries leading into the heart of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. They are critical points of entry, not only for visitors, but for local residents as well. Locals travel these byways to access their subsistence grounds or to go to jobs, or just to get out. Before such roads, you had to work even harder to make a living among the isolation and remoteness of the wild country. Travel in thick woods, on swift and deep rivers, and through ankle-breaking muskeg was exhausting, and often good maps did not exist so navigation was a challenge as well. Transportation routes, whether maintained trail, railroad, air or road, provide connectedness. Connectedness fosters community.

SUBSISTENCE

Both Alaska Native and non-Native residents of the Wrangell-St. Elias area have a long history of locally harvesting food to keep themselves alive in a harsh and less than productive region. Being able to hunt a moose, caribou or mountain sheep sometimes made the difference between life and death for early homesteaders, prospectors, and trappers who had little means to purchase supplies or no way to get to town to buy them. With the passage of ANILCA, Congress recognized the importance of wild resource harvests for rural Alaskans, applying the term "subsistence" to such harvest activities. The NPS Alaska specific regulations define subsistence uses as: "the customary and traditional uses by rural Alaska residents of wild, renewable resources for direct personal or family consumption as food, shelter, fuel, clothing, tools or transportation; for the making and selling of handicrafts out of nonedible byproducts of fish and wildlife resources taken for personal or family consumption; for barter or sharing for personal or family consumption; and for customary trade" (36 CFR 13.420).

While it is well documented that subsistence is the basis for the life and culture of the Native people in and around Wrangell-St. Elias National Park who have lived this way for generations (McKenna 1959; De Laguna 1972; McNeary 1978; Reckord 1983a; Stratton and Georgette 1984; Kari

1986; Mills and Firman 1986; Simeone 1995; Haynes and Walker 1995; Mishler and Simeone 2006; Simeone 2006; Haynes and Simeone 2007; Deur et al. 2015), it is less obvious that non-Natives also can be defined as subsistence users.⁷ From the first explorers to the present residents, subsistence resources have contributed to the diet of non-Natives of the Wrangell-St. Elias area (Reckord 1983a). At first, locally hunted foods were necessary because it was impossible to carry all that was needed to support a months-long expedition. Then they contributed much needed protein to the limited diets of the miners. Eventually, “homesteaders came to depend on subsistence foods as they attempted to develop their lands into productive farming units in an area that has been inhospitable to the farmer’s plow and his imported domesticated species” (Ibid:166).

Subsistence has been as important for the survival of the more recent, non-Native residents as it was for the original Native inhabitants of the region (Reckord 1983a). When Holly Reckord was doing her research on subsistence in the region in the 1970s, she noted, “During the seven year period in which the researcher was working in the Wrangell area, she cannot think of one person who does not utilize wild foods as some point in the year. It is a fact of life in this part of Alaska” (Ibid:252). Many of the non-Natives learned to hunt and fish and survive in the wilderness from their Native neighbors. “Others implemented techniques used on the American frontier” (Ibid:166). They built on this knowledge with their own trial and error experience, and then proceeded to teach what they knew to the next generation who came into the country to make it their home.

Contrary to the belief of some observers, the use of subsistence resources by white people in the region extends beyond mere recreation. For some white residents, subsistence has become part of a way of life that recalls our nation’s frontier history (Ibid).

The people reliant on subsistence resources in the Wrangell-St. Elias area are as varied as their backgrounds, occupations, and ways of life. But they have all come to realize the importance of locally harvested food to help sustain them, whether to supplement imported store-bought foods, to offset low incomes in a way that allows them to continue to live in the area without having to leave for jobs elsewhere, or to live in a sustainable, self-reliant way with minimal impact on the natural world.⁸

Like small communities everywhere, not everyone gets along or agrees on all issues. Some arguments have festered for years (Reckord 1983a:204-207). Yet they tend to put differences aside when it comes to lending a helping hand to a neighbor, having someone to chat with on a dark winter’s night, or protecting what they consider to be their traditional lifestyle. The defense of this common lifestyle – subsistence-based living rooted in freedom of access to wild places – has made for strange bedfellows. As Holly Reckord described in 1983:

Many of these people do not understand why their lifestyle has suddenly come under attack. After all, when they were in school, the frontier life and the enterprise of the frontiersmen were held up for admiration in textbooks and new accounts. Almost every tourist that comes through the area pats the local person on the back and says, “You’ve got a beautiful place here,” or something to that effect. As institutions begin to attack their value system by making it increasingly difficult to utilize subsistence resources in their diet or as fuel or building materials, and when the ideals of “rugged individualism” confront the administration of the Alaskan lands, these people feel that “old-time American values” are under fire.

...Recently, some of these people, who have generally allied with conservationists on many environmental issues, find that their own lifestyles are questioned by the “Sierra Clubbers from Los Angeles...” The subsistence “hippies” and self-styled

Thoreaus find themselves standing unintentionally beside their traditional enemies, the big-game hunters and developers. The present political alliances in the area are often surprising, but in fact it is not unusual for local residents in an area undergoing impact from outside to find they have more in common than was previously thought (Ibid:183-184).

Although the regional economy and population has changed since the 1980s, many people continue to devote themselves to this traditional subsistence-based lifestyle, with their identities “entwined with their abilities to survive in the wilderness” (Ibid:209). For most residents, it is a mixed cash and subsistence economy. Money is needed to buy fuel for a truck, all-terrain vehicle, airplane, snowmachine or tractor, pay for electricity and telephone, and purchase basic food, clothing and building or gardening supplies. Improved airplane or road access has made it easier to obtain outside supplies, which has meant less reliance on subsistence for some residents or even made it possible for people to live in the region who are not hunters or trappers at all. However, the ability to continue subsistence practices is not without controversy. Even 37 years after passage of ANILCA, there continue to be struggles over subsistence management in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, including the definition of who is a rural resident, what qualifies as a subsistence activity, and what type of access is allowed (Bleakley 2002:1123-1139; Larson 1998).

Despite these changes and difficulties of navigating complicated hunting regulations, the non-Native population of the Wrangell-St. Elias region continues to live a land-based existence where hunting, fishing, trapping, berry picking, cutting firewood, and growing a garden are critical elements for a happy and successful existence in this otherwise sometimes harsh country.

Endnotes

¹ For more information about the environment, landscape and resources of the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, see Bleakley 2002; Haynes and Simeone 2007; and Deur et al. 2015.

² For more about the history of ANILCA, creation of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, establishment of wilderness boundaries, and management regulations, see Bleakley 2002.

³ For more about subsistence management and regulations in Alaska, see David S. Case, *Alaska Natives and American Laws*, 3rd edition (University of Alaska Press, Fairbanks, Alaska, 2012); and Catton 1997. For more about subsistence in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve specifically, see Bleakley 2002; Norris 2002; Haynes and Simeone 2007; and Deur et al. 2015.

⁴ For more about the Kluane/Wrangell-St. Elias/Glacier Bay/Tatshenshini-Atkasut World Heritage Site, see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/72>, accessed March 6, 2017.

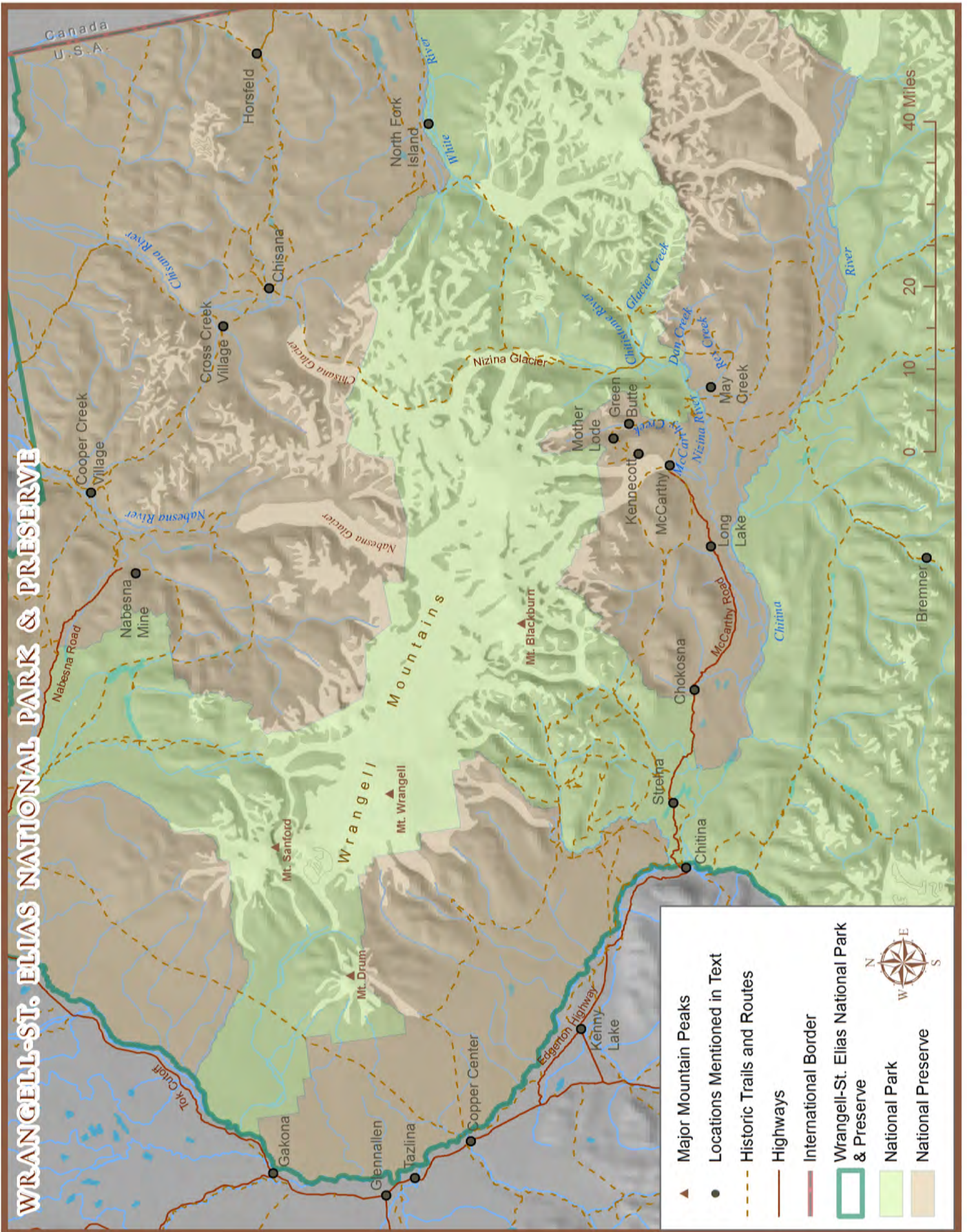
⁵ For more about the history of the Eagle-Valdez Trail, see *The Eagle-Valdez Trail: Northern Portion. A BLM “Adventure in the Past” Series*. Informational booklet published by the Bureau of Land Management in cooperation with the Eagle Historical Society and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. Fairbanks, AK, 1992; and “History of the Valdez Trail” webpage by Geoffrey Bleakley, National Park Service, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve website, <https://www.nps.gov/wrst/learn/historyculture/the-valdez-trail.htm>, accessed March 15, 2017.

⁶ For more about the lives and careers of these pilots and their work in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, see Ringsmuth 2015.

⁷ The Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence also has completed studies of numerous rural communities in the Wrangell-St. Elias area documenting local resident reliance on wild-harvested foods, including Dot Lake, Healy Lake, Tetlin, Tanacross, Northway, Tok, Chistochina, Slana, Nabesna Road, Mentasta, Gakona, Glennallen, Kenny Lake, Chitina, McCarthy, Copper Center, Tazlina, and Yakutat (Stratton and Georgette 1984; Mills and Firman 1986; Wolfe and Walker 1986; Andersen and Jennings 2001; Holen et al. 2012; Kukkonen and Zimpelman 2012; La Vine et al. 2013;

La Vine and Zimpelman 2014; Holen et al. 2015; Godduhn and Kostik 2016; and Sill et al. 2017). In addition, interviews in the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve Project Jukebox present some of the Native and non-Native history and use of the area (www.jukebox.uaf.edu/wrst, accessed December 6, 2016).

⁸In *That's The Way We Live*, Holly Reckord developed a three type typology of socio-economic niches for non-Native subsistence strategies in the Wrangell-St. Elias area that provides detailed descriptions of these different groups and their subsistence and economic patterns as of 1983 (Reckord 1983a:188-204). This is a good overview of how these groups made a living at the time.



Map 2: Communities and Mining Locations within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve

CHAPTER 3

MAKING A LIVING AS AN INDEPENDENT MINER

Attempts to extract local minerals brought lasting change to the Copper Basin. ... Although most local sites are long abandoned, mining continues in several locations. Here, a few persistent miners continue their predecessor's quest—ever searching for that one rich strike (Bleakley n.d.b:13).

INTRODUCTION

Mining has shaped both the history and the landscape of the Wrangell-St. Elias region since before non-Natives first arrived. Copper was traditionally valued by the Ahtna and Upper Tanana of the Interior and the coastal Tlingit as a ceremonial and trade item. It is believed that much of this copper came from in and around the Wrangell-St. Elias area (Swanton 1909:347-68; Emmons 1911; de Laguna 1964, 1972:899-900; Pratt 1998:82-84; Haynes and Simeone 2007; and Deur et al. 2015:93-95). From 1883-1886 and in the early 1900s, there was some exploration for gold at Cape Yakataga, Khantaak Island, and on the beach at Yakutat, but the extraction was laborious and profits were small, so the gold rush was brief (Deur et al. 2015:118-119). Most of the history of mining has been in the interior mountains and creek valleys, including those associated with the Copper River, Kennicott River, Chitina River, Chisana River, Nizina River, White River, Nabesna River, and Bremner River (Map 2).

Early Russian and American explorers heard about copper deposits from Ahtna chiefs. Eager prospectors on their way to the gold fields of the Klondike in 1896 were always looking for their mother lode, so some veered from the main Valdez to Eagle Trail in the Copper River basin in search of possible mineral outcrops. Compared with other occupational groups, like homesteaders or guides who stayed and have made their permanent homes in the region, many of those who came as miners stayed for a while but did not put down long-term roots. There have been definite periods of active mining in the Wrangell-St. Elias area (Kennecott Mine, Chisana Mining District, Bremner Mining District, Nabesna Mine) during which times miners were local residents and made contributions to the area, but after a particular mining boom was over, most prospectors moved on to other activities or locations. A variety of factors, ranging from the personal to the economic, could have influenced how long an individual miner stayed. Their claim may have proved unsuccessful, the working conditions may have become too hard to bear especially as they aged, they may have had a wife or family in the Lower 48 they had to return home to support, or, if they were working for a larger mining company, that operation may have closed down for broader economic reasons.

This discussion focuses on mining that took place within the framework of the General Mining Act of 1872 and its associated laws and regulations. In the early days, prospectors began their search by walking creeks or traversing mountains and digging exploration pits, sifting through gravel, or breaking rocks in search of gold or copper mineralization. In order to legally continue more exploration of a promising location and retain rights to develop and mine it, miners were required by law to stake a valid claim. There were several steps required to prove up on a claim.

First, they had to “locate” it, a process which generally required the claimant to post some form of notice; mark the boundaries; conduct preliminary work; and record it. In addition, the claimant had to establish that he had made a “discovery”—that is, found valuable minerals—and that they could be profitably marketed (Bleakley 2002:148).

Of course, none of this was free. Even conducting preliminary work on a claim required having enough money to purchase equipment, even if it was just a pick and shovel. If you went beyond this, the funds required went up exponentially. Margaret Keenan Harrais describes what was needed for her husband, Martin, to file on his ten claims in the upper Chitina valley in 1931:

First, there must be five hundred dollars worth of work done on every claim; then the Territory takes twenty dollars a claim for its land office fee; the surveyor charges one hundred dollars a claim for his work; the newspaper takes several hundred dollars for advertising; lastly the Federal Government takes one hundred dollars a claim for its fee. Since there are ten of the dear things, that sounds like real money to me (Harrais n.d.:166).

At least in this time period, you had to already have a substantial outlay of cash or you borrowed money to get started. Clearly, having such debt would add to the deep motivation to strike it rich.

While some men were independent small-scale miners like this and made their fortunes from the depths and dirt of the Wrangell Mountain region, others did not. Many came and tried and failed and departed. Others who were unsuccessful could or would not leave and found jobs working on the claims of other small-scale miners or worked at the larger mines, such as Kennecott, Nabesna, or Yellow Band (in the Bremner Mining District). No matter how, for whom, or when you were mining, it was hard, dirty, and dangerous work in a rugged landscape and at a remote location.

While most of the miners did not stay in the region once their claims proved unproductive or the mine they worked for closed, similar to the other occupational groups, the small-scale independent miners who did stay could not depend upon this as their sole source of income. Most of them soon began to diversify their activities. Martin Radovan seems to be an exception, as he lived year round up the Nizina River valley from about 1914 to the early 1970s, and mining provided his primary source of income. He must have been thrifty in order to live off the minimal income he would have earned. Some who arrived later, like Gary Green, who specifically came to the area in the 1970s to prospect at May Creek, fell in love with the place. Despite having little success with mining, Green found a way to make McCarthy his permanent home by becoming a sport hunting guide and pilot.

In more recent times, much of the small-scale mining only occurs during the summer months, so many miners move to Anchorage or Fairbanks or other places where they can make a living during the winter. With much of the ore already having been mined out and low prices on the international market, mining claims are not likely to produce much. Therefore, many of these miners are more like hobbyists with the money earned just being enough to pay their expenses and investment in the equipment and transportation. They mine more for the love of the chase, the thrill of searching for hidden treasure, than they do to become millionaires. Establishment of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park in 1980 created a stricter regulatory environment and made it increasingly costly to continue mining, which may have contributed to some of these people becoming the hobby miners they are today. Limited mining still continues on valid mining claims within the boundaries of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve today, for example at Dan Creek.

Much has already been written about the mining history of the Wrangell-St. Elias area, especially the large-scale industrial level mining such as at Kennecott from 1911 to 1938 (Bleakley 2002, 2007, n.d.b; Kain 2001) and Nabesna from 1900 to 1945 (Stanley 2002). There also was the Chisana Gold Rush of 1913 (Kirchhoff 1989; Bleakley 2007), and mining for gold at Bremner from 1901 to 1942 (White 2000). This chapter is not meant to re-tell this history, but to use these broad historical periods as a platform for peering into the lives of small-scale miners and looking at how their activities shaped the region, its people and their lifestyles. This is about the more hidden history of a tough breed of individual men (and some women) sluicing the creeks or digging in the ground at remote mining

claims who left few physical remains other than some rusty tools or dilapidated cabins. In addition to the lodes mentioned above, there were individual smaller gold discoveries and claims along a number of creeks, including Dan (1901), Golconda (1901), Chititu (1902), Young (1902), and Bonanza (1913) (Bleakley 2002:5). And finally, there were incredible individuals like Martin Radovan, whose nearly seventy years of devoted prospecting in the Nizina District was little known to those outside of the small local mining community (Ringsmuth 2012b).

COPPER MINING AND THE KENNECOTT ERA

Most of the early prospectors in the Kennecott-McCarthy area were looking for gold, but some became interested in copper, especially after Lieutenant Allen met with Chief Nickolai in 1885 and was told about their source of native copper (Ringsmuth 2012b:xviii) or hearing from Doc Billum, an Ahtna Indian, about a large copper deposit on the Kotsina River (Bleakley n.d.b). In 1900, prospectors Clarence Warner and Jack Smith discovered a large copper deposit at what they called the Bonanza Lode in the Kennecott River valley. A young businessman, Stephen Birch, soon purchased a controlling interest in the claim and established the Alaska Copper and Coal Company. With financial backing from the wealthy Guggenheim family and J.P. Morgan, Birch reorganized as the Kennecott Mines Company, later known as the “Alaska Syndicate,” to develop the mine and produce ore. They later incorporated themselves as the Kennecott Copper Corporation. It was soon realized that they would need a railroad to transport the large amounts of copper ore from the mill site at Kennecott to the port of Cordova for shipment to outside smelters and markets. The completion of the Copper River and Northwestern Railway in 1911 helped with the expansion of the Kennecott mine and community, as well as providing easier access for people entering other areas in the region. The population of the Chitina River valley was now on the rise. In 1915, the Kennecott Copper Corporation took over operation of the mine and ran it until 1938 when the mine closed down due to the collapse of the international market for copper. During its tenure, the Kennecott mine produced about \$200 million worth of copper, equivalent to about \$3 billion in 2017 dollars (US DOI NPS n.d.a:1).

The red buildings situated on the hillside at the former town of Kennecott have become an iconic image of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. The mining tunnels remain mostly hidden inside the mountain ridge that looms above. The Kennecott mill and town site is one of the park’s primary historic destinations for visitors. The general story of copper mining in the Wrangell Mountains and operation of the Kennecott Mine and associated Copper River and Northwestern Railway is well documented (Bleakley 2002:6-8; US DOI NPS n.d.a; Kain 2001; Olson and Shaine 2005). Less has focused on the social and cultural aspects of mining; what day-to-day life was like for miners in different places and at different times, and what society was like in the surrounding communities.

For the miners, working at Kennecott meant long hours and dangerous work. “At the height of operation, about six hundred men worked in the mines and mill town” (US DOI NPS n.d.a:1). They worked underground in stopes located four miles up the mountain from town. They worked seven days a week in cold mine shafts and inside poorly lit tunnels. They lived in thin-walled bunkhouses built on the edge of steep rock faces. Many stayed up at the mine for long periods and rarely had contact with people in town, only coming down off the mountain on a rare holiday or to pick up a paycheck on their way to McCarthy where some would spend their money on liquor and women (Olson and Shaine 2005:64). Most of the men were focused on working as much as possible to earn more money. Many sent money home to their families. The miners were paid higher wages than they would have earned mining in the Lower 48 states, but given the demanding work and lifestyle it was still not much.

Mill and plant workers, staff, and management living in town received decent salaries, were given free housing, and did not have to endure the hardships of the mine. Miners



The Miles brothers laying on a large copper nugget, Nugget Creek, 1903. Courtesy of Dick Anderson and the Library of Congress (LC-USZ62-63779).

made about \$80 per month, with about \$30 taken out each month for room and board. (In comparison, the superintendent made \$8,000 per year, plus a free house to live in.) During the span of Kennecott's operation, miners staged strikes for higher wages and better working conditions (Ibid).

The company town of Kennecott soon grew up alongside the mine, with a general store, post office, school, hospital, and recreational facilities (DOI NPS n.d.a). The mine's superintendent and foremen, mechanics, store manager, postmaster, doctor, and wives and children of some of the mine's employees lived there.

Besides the remote mountain setting and isolation from the "Outside," life in Kennecott for the families of the staff (teachers, nurses, office assistants, store managers, mechanics, etc.) and "upper crust" (management) was not entirely different than the lives of families across the country during that time. Children went to school and played, women socialized as mothers and friends and formed ladies groups and reading clubs. Any modern amenity, such as a sewing machine or cake pan, could be mail ordered through catalogues if it wasn't available through the company store in

Kennecott or in McCarthy. During holidays, the community celebrated together in the recreation hall and held parades in the street (Olson and Shaine 2005:61-62).

And like any frontier town the residents of Kennecott and the mine employees worked together to help each other in times of need, such as clearing the deep snows of prolonged blizzards, checking on each other during cold snaps, providing help or supplies to someone in need, or keeping the ice rink clear of snow. The kids attended regular school classes, but also got to play tennis or baseball and ice skate at the facilities maintained by the company, and enjoyed the benefits of wilderness living by exploring the nearby woods and creeks, fishing, and going on family trips by railroad to places like Long Lake, Chitina or Cordova. When interviewed as adults, children who grew up in Kennecott, otherwise referred to as “Kennecott Kids,” had fond memories of their childhoods and lives in the old mill town (Kain 2001; Olson and Shaine 2005). Many of them left the community for high school and did not return, or had to move with their families when the mine closed and their father needed to find work elsewhere.

However, some stayed, like Bud Seltenreich. Bud was born in 1915 at the hospital in Kennecott, Alaska. His parents had a laundry service and operated a restaurant in McCarthy during the time the Kennecott Mine operated. He worked for Gillam Airlines and the McCarthy Garage as a mechanic and also worked for the Alaska Road Commission. He bought a plane with his two brothers in 1930 and they had one of the first airplanes in McCarthy. He was the chief mechanic at the Alaska Division of Pan American Airlines for many years in Fairbanks. He also operated a small flying school and flying service (Seltenreich 1990).

The community of McCarthy also developed in response to the mining at Kennecott, but had quite a different feel from the mill town (Kirchhoff 1993; Olson and Shaine 2005). McCarthy, located about five miles down the road from Kennecott, was where the railroad turned around and became a regional supply hub and jumping off point for those venturing along the trails further into the Wrangell Mountains. But it also supplemented life in Kennecott by providing saloons and prostitutes, neither of which were allowed in the company town. This began a close symbiotic relationship between Kennecott and McCarthy, with McCarthy’s economy being heavily dependent upon the residents of Kennecott coming there to spend their hard-earned cash. During the height of the mining era, more than 100 people lived in McCarthy, with thousands more passing through (Olson and Shaine 2005:66). In the early days, McCarthy had a reputation for being a bit of a rough and tumble town. The children growing up at Kennecott recall that they were not allowed to go into McCarthy (Kain 1991, 2001). In addition, only mining company employees were allowed to live at Kennecott, so McCarthy provided a place to live for others moving into the area to take advantage of expanding mining, trapping, hunting, business, and homesteading opportunities. A miner living in a remote cabin as far away as Chitstone Pass, Chisana, Dan Creek, or Bremner, might travel into McCarthy for supplies, to pick up mail, to have a drink at the saloon and share tall tales with the guys, or to spend the winter with other people in town when they could not be mining. Or as Margaret Harrais, who was the school teacher in McCarthy in 1929, mentioned, celebration of the Christmas holiday was another enticement for the miners to come to town: “Men come from far distant camps, mush dogs over glaciers and treacherous rivers, just to hear eight little kiddies give a program and see them get a Christmas treat” (Harrais n.d.:148).

A key player in McCarthy in the 1920s and 1930s was Kate Kennedy. While she has been disparagingly described as a “former dance hall girl from Dawson, grown a little on the hefty side, and she made a regal and dignified-looking madame” (Kirchhoff 1993:67), in reality she was an entrepreneur, business and property owner, and community leader (Garrett 2017). Kate was sixteen years old when she crossed Chilkoot Pass in 1898 with her husband, Charles J. Kennedy, who mined in the Yukon, and by 1910 was at Candle Creek, north of Nome, Alaska. After a divorce, she came to McCarthy around 1914 (Janson 1981:67) and after her five-bedroom cabin with an inside bath house burned down in 1921, she bought the Alaska House hotel (Garrett 2017). She also ran a brothel, a card



Picnic near McCarthy Creek, 1928. Left to right: Jean Tjosevig, Phyllis Reed, Eleanor Tjosevig, Nels Tjosevig, Ennis Reed, Gene Garrity. Courtesy of Eleanor Tjosevig and Dick Anderson.

room, a saloon, the hotel's restaurant and a cafe, and was co-owner with Sig Wold of McCarthy's first taxi service (Ibid). They had a big car with running boards and bumpers that they used to transport miners who during their time off wanted to go to McCarthy for some entertainment but did not want to walk the five miles to and from Kennecott. Previously, this route was done by dog team, but Sig and Kate were the first to use an automobile. Kate was a savvy business woman who diversified her investments to protect her hard-earned resources. She knew what men wanted and found a way to provide it for them. Her businesses filled a niche and she prospered.

Kate was not the only woman in McCarthy during this time. Alvina Schultz ("Schultzie"), a former chorus girl from Chicago who was mixed race but passed for white and was married to mining engineer Henry Schultz, ran a dress shop where she sold exotic furs and the latest fashion from San Francisco. Mrs. Garity, Kate's sister, was a seamstress for Kate's "girls" (Ibid). And there were the wives of the other merchants, who considered themselves "the high society women of McCarthy." In an effort to replicate life where they had come from, these women gathered for teas, socials, and card games, but did not include Kate Kennedy. They even went as far as to move their book club meetings to Kennecott as a way to keep working women of McCarthy, like Kate, from participating (Garrett 2017). As a blue-collar working woman who had been accused of criminal activity (lewd behavior, prostitution, and making and selling alcohol), they looked down on Kate as lower class and a poor influence. Mr. Marshall, one of the McCarthy merchants, apparently was particularly against her and alcohol, and on a number of different occasions wrote inflammatory letters to the court in Valdez trying to get her arrested (Garrett 2017). Despite these differences, Kate Kennedy was a social butterfly who hosted her own dinners where her guests called her "a lovely, generous woman," and



Kate Kennedy and Sig Wold on one of their taxis in front of her Alaska House hotel in McCarthy, Alaska, circa 1922. Courtesy of Patt Garrett, Neil Darish, and the McCarthy-Kennicott Historical Museum.

the children of McCarthy liked visiting her (Ibid). She socialized with wives of nearby farmers, would meet Augusta Radovan half-way up the Nizina Trail to exchange mail, and helped stake claims for old miners down on their luck (Ibid). However, she also had a reputation as being a force to be reckoned with. When she met the new railroad station agent in 1935, she gave him a piece of her mind about the high price she had to pay for freight (Kirchhoff 1993:86). Such toughness was probably a trait essential for surviving in the male-dominated world in which she lived and worked.



Ladies of McCarthy sitting on boardwalk, July 4, circa 1927-28. Eleanor Tjosevig Collection, courtesy of Dick Anderson and the McCarthy-Kennicott Historical Museum.



POOL

Celebration
July 4th
at McCarthy

Ice-Cream
Parlor

Kate Kennedy must have been doing well for herself, though, because in 1924, she moved her house closer to downtown McCarthy. It was the epitome of modern luxury. It had indoor plumbing, had electricity provided by the latest model of generator, and was stylishly decorated with linoleum and flowered wall paper. With a loss of clients after the mine shut down in 1938, and the hotel burning down in 1940, Kate left McCarthy and moved to Portland, Oregon. She died in Salem, Oregon in the mid to late 1960s (Garrett 2017). Kate Kennedy's house still stands on the main street of McCarthy and efforts are underway to restore it (Ibid).

With the end of the Kennecott era and the closure of the railroad as the main transportation link, the entire social and economic structure of the Chitina River valley shifted. Kennecott and McCarthy became ghost towns with the only residents being a mine caretaker and a few squatters in the old buildings around McCarthy. After a period of decline, McCarthy's population has been on the rise since the late 1970s, with the year-round population ranging from 25 to 103, depending on the year and the different geographical boundaries used (US Census Bureau 2012:15; La Vine and Zimpelman 2014:147). McCarthy is proud of its mining history and remains a hub community for Kennecott. Being at the end of the McCarthy Road, it is a gateway into the park, has a large and active gravel airstrip, and is a place where visitors to the area can find accommodations and a good meal, and learn about the local cultural and natural history. For residents, McCarthy is a tight-knit community fighting hard to protect its frontier heritage, but, as in former times, it is a place both of camaraderie and of conflict. The story of this more recent part of McCarthy's history is addressed in Chapter 6: A Homesteader's Life.

However, there is more to the story of mining in the Wrangell Mountains than just the highly visible remnants of the buildings at Kennecott.

Kennecott was one of the richest ore bodies ever discovered, and yielded most of the region's mineral wealth. However, significant exploration and mining development occurred elsewhere in the district at the *Mother Lode* on the east side of Bonanza Ridge; the *Green Butte* on McCarthy Creek; the *Westover* on a tributary of Dan Creek; and the *Valdez* on a tributary of the Kuskulana (US DOI NPS n.d.c).

Not only was the style of mining different between the large-scale operations of Kennecott and these smaller remote claims, but the lifestyle of the miners varied as well. Always in search of that mother lode, obsessed prospectors soon began traveling farther and farther up creeks and valleys into the mountains. With picks and shovels, they dug into the ground. With high pressure hoses, they used water to move dirt and rocks into pans and sluice boxes to float out the debris and find prized gold left behind. Some were rewarded and filed claims on the discoveries, others soon gave up and went home empty handed or moved to other mining districts that they heard had better prospects. Finding the prized ore deposit was only the beginning. Now the hard work of small-scale mining began. It meant living in a canvas tent at first and then usually building a small log cabin by hand. It meant cutting and hauling firewood to keep the cabin warm and carrying water from a nearby stream for cooking, washing, and bathing. There was no electricity, so the only light in the cabin was from a small window, candles, and oil lamps. Cooking was usually on the woodstove, with basic supplies like flour, oats, beans, and rice being supplemented by locally harvested meat. It was a cold, dark and dirty existence. And that was just to survive.

The actual practice of mining was strenuous work. First, large volumes of dirt and rock were dug up, and then you stood in cold water all day sluicing or panning through the pile. It was the same routine day in and day out, for months at a time. Rain or shine, and with throngs of mosquitoes buzzing about – the scourge of summer activities in most of Alaska. And then, of course, there were the difficult traveling conditions of getting to and from your claim, whether by walking, by means



Flumes at Bonanza Creek, circa 1913. Alaska State Library, Loreta Larson Photograph Collection, ASL-P146-13.

of a horse pack train, with a dog team in the winter months, or in later years perhaps with an airplane. Therefore, these miners tended not to travel to town very often, instead choosing to remain on their claims working the land.

Typically, these miners were men on their own. Sometimes they might have a partner or two to help ease the load of the heavy work involved, but rarely were women or children around as in the larger mining towns of Kennecott or Chisana. However, there are a few cases in these early days of prospecting where women were included. For example, Matilda Wales, Nels P. Nelson (often referred to by the initials N.P.) and Billy James made the first significant placer discovery near the mouth of Bonanza Creek in May 1913, and a find later made by James and Wales upstream on Eldorado Creek led to the Chisana Gold Rush. In 1914, Martin Radovan brought his new bride, Augusta Louise Iverson, to the upper Nizina River. “Moving seasonally between the cabin at Dan Creek and the camp at Glacier Creek, she made a life with him in the Nizina country for three decades” (Ringsmuth 2012b:xxiv). While Augusta did not climb the precipitous slopes of Radovan Gulch as her husband did, she supported his mining ambitions and kept the home fires burning and meals on the table. In this way, she played an important role in him being able to continue his exploration and

mining. And Margaret HARRAIS helped her husband, Martin, in the summer time on his claims on the Upper Chitina River, but she did more of the cooking and housework and not the actual mining. In the winter, Margaret lived in McCarthy where she taught school to supplement their meager mining earnings.

It could not have been an easy life for either Matilda or Augusta, being isolated in a remote cabin cooking and cleaning and waiting for their husbands to return. Matilda was close enough to Chisana, which at the time was a booming town, where she could obtain some other company. And Augusta was known in McCarthy for “socializing with important figures in the Woman’s Christian Temperance Movement” (Ibid), and she regularly went into Dan Creek to socialize, the closest community to their cabin (Ibid:27). Augusta had worked as a bookkeeper at Kennecott, and was a notary and postmistress at Dan Creek, all of which helped provide some income to support the Radovan’s mining lifestyle (Ibid:xxv). However, for both women, there was a limited amount of female company to be had. They were clearly immersed in a man’s world.

Since the written history of this period of mining in the Wrangell Mountains mostly focuses on the ore discoveries and the booms and busts of the mining industry, little is available about how women fared or how they felt about living isolated and mostly in the company of men. A journal kept by Augusta Radovan from 1930 to 1931 offers some insight. We learn that while she spent countless

hours alone at the cabin, watching and feeding birds and observing local wildlife gave her great pleasure. It is also clear that Martin spent most of his time focused on mining while she was busy with household tasks, including one time where she had to put out a grass fire (Ibid:30). Augusta Radovan's journal indicates that she took care of some of the bachelor miners, which one might expect from a mining society where people looked out for each other. More surprising is that part of her daily routine when living at the Dan Creek cabin seemed to include visiting the wives of other miners (Ibid). At this time, prospecting at Dan Creek was on the rise, with a small community having developed there.

The mining community that materializes from the pages of Augusta's journal exhibits, in big ways and small, the same social norms as any rural town in America. In what was generally perceived as a male-dominated frontier that supposedly lacked a social class structure, a majority of the social organizers and cultural facilitators in this Nizina community were in fact women (Ibid).

Given what is now mostly uninhabited wilderness in the Nizina River valley, it is hard to imagine how populated and "civilized" it was during the heyday of mining in the 1920s and 1930s. The communities of Kennecott, McCarthy and Dan Creek were closely linked. There were roadways connecting them, with bridges across side creeks, and roadhouses along the way where travelers could stay and get a hot meal. Places like the Nizina Roadhouse, at one point run by Mrs. Cole (Garrett 2017), also were the hub of the area's social network (Ringsmuth 2012b:34). Augusta Radovan's journal clearly shows that miners' wives did not spend all their time alone in isolated cabins, as is often assumed. "They had public and social lives in which they organized everything from entertainment to morality" (Ibid:32).

Martin and Augusta did not live a solitary life, suspended from other people, modern goods, and services. On the contrary, Augusta paints for us a picture of two people fully engaged in early twentieth century American society and culture. They participated in a community that replicated most rural American towns. It was a place where both men and women played major roles. And their livelihood was dependent on an industrialized economy that, through various modes of transportation, communication, and distant markets, linked their life at Dan Creek to people and places throughout the world (Ibid:38).

However, this social interaction subsided when Martin and Augusta moved over to Glacier Creek, where they were the only people and from where it was much farther and more difficult to travel to Dan Creek or McCarthy. They did go into "town" periodically, but it was at least a two day trip. The Nizina Roadhouse and others at Spruce Point and Peavine Bar were critical stopping places. Not only did these roadhouses provide a welcome break and rest from the burden of hard traveling, but they provided social interaction otherwise missing from the Radovans' now more isolated existence.

Despite being in what, by today's standards, we would consider isolated frontier locations, the miners and mining communities were remarkably well connected to the "outside world" – perhaps more connected than someone in the same places would be today. There was a regular system of maintained trails and transportation corridors making travel between camps and communities relatively easy – easy, that is, if you were willing to hike mile after mile over rugged terrain, to brave the cold of a winter dogsled ride, to bump along rutted roadways in an automobile and push it out of deep mud holes, or wade through deep snow or cold overflow when water flowed through cracks in the ice. The airplane and mail service were perhaps the most critical links. Miners like the Radovans were highly dependent upon supplies ordered from outside, as well as on mail service. While they



Women of the Wrangell-St. Elias mining camps adapted to the rugged lifestyle that faced them and found ways to regularly socialize with each other. Kitty Hoyt (right) and an unidentified woman enjoy a picnic in front of a campfire. Harry and Norma Hoyt family papers. Archives and Special Collections, Consortium Library, University of Alaska Anchorage.

did rely on some locally harvested foods, the Nizina district did not have enough natural resources available to sustain the growing population, so mostly they used canned food, dry goods, bacon, and beans that they purchased in McCarthy or in later years were delivered to them by plane (Ibid:35). In the discussion of the Radovans' homelife as presented in Ringsmuth 2012b, there is no mention that they had a garden or did much hunting. Emphasis is on their connections with supply lines for food being shipped in. It is possible, that they, like other miners in the region, did some hunting for food and raised a small kitchen garden if the soil and environmental conditions allowed. However, conditions at Glacier Creek and in the Nizina River valley were likely not very favorable to successful gardening. Mail allowed them to communicate with and stay connected to far away family, as well as allowing Martin to stay in contact with the mining industry regarding his prospects and ore samples and with the Department of Mines so he remained in compliance with regulations (Ibid).

No matter what the role of these mining wives in their marriages or their communities, they were women most likely from working class backgrounds accustomed to working hard and surviving with just the basics of life. Instead of wearing fancy long dresses and sitting around in parlors drinking tea and doing needlepoint as upper class urban women of the time might have done, the women of mining wore boots and parkas, hauled water, fished in creeks, collected and chopped firewood, baked bread in a woodstove, and hiked many miles across rugged country to get supplies or visit with a neighbor. They certainly must have been hardy souls. They were pioneers who laid the groundwork for later women of the Wrangell-St. Elias wilderness who pushed the boundaries of what women could do.

EARLY DAYS OF INDIVIDUAL MINERS

A list of people in the Wrangell-St. Elias area from 1796 to 1950 compiled by former WRST historian Geoff Bleakley is dominated by miners or people associated with the mining industry

(Bleakley 2006). This shows the huge influence mining has had on the region. As previously stated, most of these miners were only in the country temporarily and the independent, small-scale operators were what Bleakley has termed “the forgotten prospectors.” They toiled under the shadow of the corporate giants, such as the Kennecott Copper Corporation, never receiving fame or fortune (Bleakley n.d.b; Ringsmuth 2012b). However, some did leave a legacy on the landscape through the tradition of naming a creek after whoever was the first or main prospector there. Examples include James Creek, Powell Creek, Carl Creek, Bell Creek, Wilson Creek and Toby Creek in the Chisana District (Thorall 2006:AAF-9404). Some of these locally known names replaced Native place names and others have themselves been replaced by official names put on a map by later USGS surveyors (Ibid).

One such little known miner was Neil Finnesand who arrived in the Copper River valley from his native Norway in 1906 to prospect for copper along the Kotsina River. He soon began prospecting on his own and proceeded to move around following various mining activities (Finnesand 1977). According to Bleakley, Finnesand located “a rich vein of silver and copper on Granite Mountain. Gold fever struck Finnesand in 1913, when he joined the stampede to Chisana. His stay there, however, was brief, and after a stint working at Kennecott, he returned to the Kotsina area, where he worked his copper claims on Rock Creek until 1979” (Bleakley 2006:38). In the late 1960s, newly arrived Curtis Green met Finnesand who was living in Chitina, but at age eighty was still mining his claim at nearby Spirit Mountain. As Curtis Green explains:

So that very afternoon we took off from One Mile Lake, on floats, Howard [Knutson] at the controls, to land at Tebay Lake, where a small gnome-like rheumy-eyed old man waited to escort us to Spirit Mt.

“Fellows, meet, Neil Finnesand,” Howard said as he tied up the plane and we began unloading supplies. He chatted with Neil for a few minutes, saying he would be back next morning with the rest of the crew, and took off.

Neil Finnesand, at 80, was the still very active prospector whose nickel/silver claim at the base of Spirit Mt was our destination. He had arrived in the Chitina area from his native Norway as a young man in 1905 before there even was a Chitina. Invariably of good cheer, I never heard him say a negative word about anybody during the 25 years I knew him, for he lived to the age of 105. At one time he had supplied Chitina with fire wood which he cut by hand with a “Swede” saw, or bow saw and hauled with a team of horses. He had also at one time delivered mail to McCarthy via dog team. In his fifties he had married for the first time, a much younger Native girl and fathered three daughters and two sons. He lived alone now in the old house down by Town Lake that I suppose he had lived in since the beginning (C. Green 1987:5).

Neil Finnesand died in January 1988 at the age of 104 (Bleakley 2006:38).

Of special note in this group of lesser known individual miners was Martin Radovan. While similar to Finnesand in staying in the Wrangell Mountains for most of their adult lives, Radovan was known specifically for his persistence in his search for copper, most notably for a deposit up Glacier Creek at a place now known as Radovan Gulch. Although Katherine Ringsmuth has produced an excellent and detailed account of the life and accomplishments of Martin Radovan titled *Tunnel Vision: The Life of a Copper Prospector in the Nizina River Country* (Ringsmuth 2012b), it is important to provide some highlights here as he represents the type of prospector that defined the early days of mining in the Wrangell-St. Elias area.

Martin Radovan (originally Radovanovich) was born in Žrnovo, Croatia, an Austrian province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in 1882 and arrived in Cordova, Alaska in 1908 (Ibid). He immediately found work on the construction of the Copper River and Northwestern Railway. In 1912, he took

his first mining job in the Nizina Mining District with the Andrus Mining Company that was using a hydraulic system for placer mining at Chititu Creek. Eventually, he built a cabin on Dan Creek, which he used as a base camp for his own prospecting efforts throughout the upper Nizina River valley and tributaries. Like other placer miners at Dan Creek, Martin Radovan utilized a strong spray of water to loosen the dirt and transport gold-bearing gravel to sluice boxes. Later he tunneled into a mountain in search of mineralized bedrock (Ibid:29). Although mostly a miner, at one point during the Depression and in desperate need of money, Martin did take a job with the Kennecott Corporation doing assessment work for a new road, and his wife, Augusta, worked as a typist (Ibid:38). Although continuing to mine at Dan Creek into the 1970s, Martin Radovan claimed that he never earned more than \$6000 for his efforts (Ibid).

Eventually, Martin's search for the next big copper deposit brought him to Glacier Creek, a tributary of the Chitistone River, where he began prospecting the steep cliffs of a glacial cirque. In 1929, he staked thirty copper lode claims in and around what was eventually called "Radovan Gulch" (Bleakley 2006:100). Martin became the first person to reach a large copper stain on the steep walled face of the ravine, known as the Binocular Prospect because it was so hard to reach that it had previously only be viewed through binoculars. Martin was soon known for his fearlessness, remarkable climbing ability and dogged determination to mine that outcropping. With the help of Augusta, Martin built a trail, cut steps into the nearly vertical wall, and ascended the final 200 feet with ropes (Ibid:43). There is even a photo of him climbing a ladder hanging on a sheer rock face (Ibid:54). By 1930, the Radovans built a small cabin on Glacier Creek and Martin focused his attention on the rock above. "For the next ten years, Martin devoted all his time and energy to tunneling towards his mountain of copper, attempting to realize his dream" (Ibid:50). After the death of Augusta in 1944 and the shift in the economics of copper mining during World War II, Martin's mining lifestyle also changed. He continued to work on the Binocular Prospect, but also began to search for other veins.

Radovan did all of his mining by hand. He drilled blast holes with a hand steel and single-jack hammer and shoveled rock debris out of holes and tunnels. The major problem he ran into though as a solo miner was crossing Glacier Creek in the summer. But typical of miners and frontiersmen of the time, Radovan was a resourceful and creative problem solver. With necessity being the mother of invention, he constructed a simple system of elevated cables and a hand tram that would hold himself and supplies (Ibid:58). In addition to his toughness as a miner and his extensive knowledge of the geology and terrain of the Nizina district, in his later years Martin was known for his idiosyncratic personality, loner lifestyle, and odd assortment of wildlife pets (Ibid:60-64). By the 1950s and 1960s, Martin had help with his mining operation, including Jim Edwards, Calvin and Viola Aiken, and Loy Green. Eventually, he incorporated the Radovan Gulch Copper Company and continued his persistent determination to find his fortune in the rock. By the 1970s, Martin was getting too old to work his claim, and at one point hired Gary Green to work for him to keep his claims current (Ibid:84). Martin Radovan was a tough and courageous man, continuing to work his claims until he was close to 90 years old. He certainly must have been one of the oldest prospectors on record. He died on June 20, 1975 in Delano, California. After 70 years in the Nizina, he definitely was there longer than any other miner.

NIZINA MINING DISTRICT

Dan Creek and Chititu Creek

When Martin Radovan entered the Nizina Mining District in 1912, it was already in the throes of a mining rush. Prospectors first entered the Nizina Basin and detected placer gold on Dan Creek in 1899. Clarence Warner and Dan Kain staked much of the drainage in 1901, and by 1902 "outfits headed by Frank Kernan, Charles Koppus, and M. T. Rowland explored many nearby steams, including



Thirty-five meter long rope ladder used to access mineral outcropping at Radovan Gulch, circa 1955. Courtesy of the Edwards family.

Chititu Creek” (Bleakley n.d.b:7). Despite the enthusiasm, most of the claims in the district proved unprofitable. But by 1912, a more corporate approach was taken with the Nizina Mining Company holding claims at Chititu Creek and the Dan Creek Mining Company running operations at Dan Creek. Dan Creek Mining Company patented their claims in 1910 and 1923. Large quantities of gold came out of this area into the 1920s, but by the late 1930s production declined (Ibid:8). While gold has been the chief yield from Dan Creek, forty tons of copper nuggets also have been produced, including discovery of a three-ton copper nugget (Miller 1946; Tallman 2015).

In addition to the large mining camp and community at Dan Creek, there were also several large camps on Chititu Creek. This thriving region attracted miners working for companies like the Dan Creek Mining Company and the Andrus Mining Company (also known as Chititu Mining Company),

but also provided opportunities for individual prospectors to have a base for heading farther afield into the smaller creeks. They could purchase supplies at Dan Creek, they could find accommodations at the Nizina Roadhouse, and there were other miners present from whom they could learn, compare stories, and share information. The Nizina District was the regional gold mining hub as indicated by a series of roadways and trails from McCarthy to Dan Creek, up the Nizina River, and into Chitistone Canyon and Glacier Creek. Unlike today, it was possible to drive to Dan Creek from the end of the railroad at McCarthy. A dirt road was maintained and there was a wood planked bridge across the raging Nizina River. The bridge was not strong enough to withstand the force of being hit by ice moving during spring break-up or during an outburst flood released from a glacier-dammed lake, so it was often washed out and replaced regularly. A handful of people continue to live at Dan Creek, including Fred Denner who arrived in 1975, was caretaker at the mine, and has continued to live there making a living from trapping, hunting and photography. Current residents are more isolated than their predecessors. The bridge over the Nizina River washed out long ago, and the road is no longer maintained. Parts of it can be accessed by four-wheeler, but the primary connection to the outside world is via the airstrips at Dan Creek and May Creek, or traveling to McCarthy by snowmachine in the winter after the river has frozen and travel across it is safe.

Bud Seltenreich, who was born in Kennecott in 1915 and grew up in McCarthy and on a homestead on the Nizina River, utilized his mechanic skills and worked one summer at the Dan Creek Mine. By this time, life in the camp was more advanced; they even had electricity.

They were putting in a new pipeline and I worked on that job as the compressor operator. There weren't any compressors for the hard rock. So jackhammers and stuff like that. They had a hydroelectric plant up there at Dan Creek. A good one that supplied the camp with electricity and so forth, and up on the site. And after that everything was coming to the pipeline. They didn't have any electricity there. We ran the compressor with a gasoline engine (Seltenreich 1990).

The closure of the Copper River and Northwestern Railway as their main method of ore transport and restrictions on gold mining during World War II pretty much shut down mining in the Nizina (Ibid). But in 1947, J. B. O'Neill purchased the Dan Creek Mining Company. He previously had been a merchant in McCarthy and also operated a freight transport business which got him involved with mining in the McCarthy region. It is questionable how productive his operation ever was. In 1975, Dan Creek Partners bought the 700-plus-acre patented mining property of the former Dan Creek Mining Company with above- and below-ground rights. A court injunction in 1985 required the National Park Service to conduct an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on all mining operations to evaluate the cumulative effects.¹ In 1993, Dan Creek Partners subdivided the lower half of their Dan Creek property into 60 one-acre lots and have been selling lots to encourage resettlement of the area (Tallman 2015). NPS has made its own efforts to obtain some of these old private mining properties for conservation purposes (Bleakley 2002:250). As of 2017, the NPS has acquired all the patented claims owned by the Andrus family in the Chititu drainage (Ibid:81; D. Rosenkrans pers. comm. 2017). Today, Dan Creek remains one of the few places in the park where mining continues. Since the mid-1990s, Fred Denner has done some gold panning and small-scale sluicing there, and Randy Elliot has utilized heavy equipment and modern suction dredge technology hoping to recover gold that old methods left behind.

May Creek

Similar to Dan Creek, May Creek has a history of residents making a living from a combination of prospecting, guiding, and trapping. When mining at Chititu was in full operation, Tess and Walter

Holmes ran a roadhouse at May Creek. According to Curtis Green, they had sold the property to Al and Francis Gagnon by the late 1960s and were moving out (C. Green 1987:14). The Gagnons proceeded to make May Creek their permanent home (Bleakley 2002:111 & 201). Besides being a mining area, in the 1950s May Creek served as the access point for Merle Smith's "Sourdough Tours" to Kennecott and McCarthy. An airstrip originally constructed around 1934 was lengthened in 1947 to accommodate Smith's DC-3s. At the time, the road to McCarthy and bridge over the Nizina River were still passable. After the last collapse of the bridge after the 1964 earthquake this was no longer the case. According to Curtis Green who arrived in the McCarthy area in the late 1960s, Tom Gilmore who lived in McCarthy and Bud Bowen who lived on the May Creek Road worked for the state highway commission and were responsible for maintaining the road.

This, of course, was a monumental joke, because what they were maintaining, in effect, was a road that nobody used that went nowhere. You couldn't even drive all the way to May Creek, but only as far as the Nizina River, about 10 miles, where you could sit and contemplate the washed out bridge and view May Creek, an airstrip and old roadhouse, now closed, off in the distance. Nevertheless, every morning, Bud would drive to town in the orange highway commission truck, pick up Tom, overall clad, lunch pail in hand, and they would solemnly set forth to work. What did they do all day? Well, we speculated endlessly about that, with out [sic] ever coming to any conclusion other than that it was no doubt the best maintained stretch of dirt road in the country (C. Green 1987:14).

The airstrip at May Creek has served as a vital link for residents as their transportation hub and post office with mail being flown in once or twice a week depending on demand and the weather. In 1948, local residents constructed the May Creek mail cabin as a place for shelter and mail collection and distribution. The National Park Service helped restore the historic structure in 1984. Like with Dan Creek, winter travel by snowmachine is the least expensive option for getting into the area and the best way to haul large amounts of supplies. Today, the May Creek airstrip also is a popular jumping off spot for recreational and hunting trips into the Wrangell Mountains.² The National Park Service currently has a field operations center at May Creek.³

Rex Creek

Rex Creek, which flows from Rex Glacier and joins with White Creek to form Chititu Creek, is less well known than Dan Creek and is another area within the Nizina District that has been the focus of prospecting. It was first explored in 1902 and Everett Brooks staked the first claim there in 1909. In 1915, John Price and Frank Manley took over mining the claim, but it never produced much. There is little documentation about the mining operations, how much gold eventually came out of the drainage, or the people living at Rex Creek, although it is assumed that it was similar to those at nearby Dan Creek and May Creek during the same era. However, the men mining at Rex Creek in the 1920s and 1930s were more independent and small-scale than the company level mining at Dan Creek, so it seems possible that they were more isolated and spread out along the creek than was the community at Dan Creek. The Chititu Mines Company created by John Andrus in 1921 also mined claims at Rex Creek. Finally, in the 1950s, Walter Holmes acquired Price and Manley's patented claim, but it appears that he did not make a fortune from it as he had hoped. Upon his death, Holmes willed the claim to his widow, Tess, who sold it to Roscoe Livingston and Eula Vickery in 1971. Despite the area being within the newly formed national park, in 1981 they leased it to Gary Willis. In 1986, Russ Hoffman mined at Rex Creek (Bleakley 2002:146). He had worked for Willis and acquired the property after 1983.



Pack train leaving McCarthy crossing bridge at McCarthy Creek, circa 1920. Photo by H.P. Hubrick. Gail Steen Collection, Cordova Historical Society, 88-34-41.

McCarthy Creek

The mother lode copper find made at Kennecott encouraged additional prospecting in other parts of the region. Completion of the railroad in 1911 made it possible for companies to develop nearby prospects. They now had a reliable means of transportation for people, supplies, and extracted ore. However, not many of the non-Kennecott properties produced much copper. The two that were the most successful – the Mother Lode Mine on the east side of Bonanza Ridge and the Green Butte Mine on McCarthy Creek southeast of the Mother Lode – exploited the same geological formation as the Kennecott mines. The Green Butte lode was discovered by John E. Barrett in 1906. He went on to stake the land that became the town of McCarthy, which ended up being a more lucrative endeavor for him than mining (Kirchhoff 1993:28). In 1922, the Green Butte Mining Company acquired the property, and built camps to support the crews and a tram for access to the tunnel high above the valley floor. A road was constructed along McCarthy Creek to transport miners and supplies to the Mother Lode and Green Butte Mines and bring ore out to the railroad at McCarthy. The road was heavily used during the mines' tenure, even by residents of McCarthy and Kennecott for pleasure driving, and so was kept maintained and passable, including bridges over tributary creeks.

He was kind of an entrepreneur. He was in everything. He sold life insurance. He had a water system in town. And he sold lots, and he did this and that and the other thing. Plus he was one of the managers of the Green Butte Mine. It was a busy place. And he had a water system there. He had a couple water tanks up on stilts high above everything else in town. And he had what you call a ram down in the creek. He

had a couple of them down there. I had the opportunity sometimes to go up to the Green Butte Mine. There was a big road up there. In fact, that road up to the Green Butte and Mother Lode Mine was one of the better roads around here. They built a fine road up there. I'm not sure who built it. I think the Mother Lode probably did most of the building of the road. But the Green Butte Mine was probably involved, too, because they had trucks to haul the ore out with and so did the Mother Lode (Seltenreich 1990).

By the end of World War I, the Mother Lode Mine was incorporated into the Kennecott operation. The Green Butte Mine produced copper ore until 1925 when the price of copper dropped so low that it was no longer an economically viable operation. With closure of the mine, the road fell into disrepair and the washed-out bridges were not replaced. According to Curtis Green, in March of 1967, Gordon Burdick, another McCarthy resident, and his wife Frieda, had plans to rebuild the road and develop a copper claim up at Nicolai Butte and offered him a job. "Without actually promising anything, not even wages for our help, he nevertheless conveyed the distinct possibility of, if not striking it rich, at least making a tidy sum" (C. Green 1987:10). According to Curtis,

Gordon had never actually been to the claim up Nicolai Butte. Originally filed by Henry Schultz, it had even been drilled back in the fifties and determined that it was not worth developing. Gordon had to know that, but it did not prevent him from convincing himself—and apparently Frieda, as well as Joe Boothby, a supposedly astute Seattle business man—that a great deposit of high grade copper lay concealed there. Actually, he wasn't so much building a road as re-opening an old wagon road that had connected McCarthy to the Green Butte mine that had operated briefly back in the twenties. The biggest part of the job was the construction of several bridges over McCarthy creek. By the time we joined on, the bridge at five mile was nearing completion, so that is where we began (Ibid:15).

In the late 1970s, a few prospectors worked up McCarthy Creek, hoping to make new finds at old mining claims. They were not successful (Olson and Shaine 2005:67). By the early 1980s, floods had once again eaten away at the roadways and washed out any new bridges that had been put in since the 1920s, making access to these old mines more difficult. In 1988, David Bartoli leased the Green Butte Mine property hoping to mine there but McCarthy residents opposed his plan. Interestingly, it was this old roadway that "Papa Pilgrim" and the Hale family started to bulldoze to their homesite ("Hillbilly Heaven") up McCarthy Creek in the early 2000s claiming it to be an existing trail and right of way. This led to conflict with the National Park Service over access issues (Kizzia 2013).

UPPER CHITINA RIVER

Although it was not a heavily mined region, Martin HARRAIS, a former employee of the Kennecott Copper Mine, was one person who ventured into the upper Chitina River region as far up as the Chitina Glacier in search of mineral wealth. He was born in 1865 in Riga, Latvia, and prior to working at Kennecott had mined successfully in the Klondike and Fairbanks. Unfortunately, he ended up losing most of his fortune as a result of bad investments in the doomed town of Chena (Bleakley 2006:49). Prior to moving to the upper Chitina River country in 1926, Martin and his wife, Margaret, lived in McCarthy. Having already been a teacher in the Lower 48 and superintendent of schools in Fairbanks, Margaret arrived in 1923 and soon made a name for herself in the small community. She was the school teacher for the town's eleven children. Being a woman who devoted herself to causes she believed in, she helped establish a chapter of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union,



Margaret Harrais when she was a teacher in McCarthy, 1925. Courtesy of Dick Anderson.

started “The Royal Reading Club,” and established a library. She was particularly happy about the library since it was “doing something for the social life of a lot of lonesome people, especially unattached men” (Harrais n.d.:160-161). Being strongly against alcohol, she was not pleased with the men from the mine using McCarthy as their playground. She applied her strong moral underpinnings to other issues of importance to her, including education, voting rights, wage equality, and justice (Munsey 1975). Apparently, “she was interested in everything that went on in McCarthy,” including what happened at trials and how jurors behaved (Hunt 1998:189).

Margaret Harrais was one of the few women in the McCarthy area at the time and her writings provide a useful perspective.⁴ She comments on being pleased to have amenities such as a sewing machine and a phonograph, a screened-in porch with a hammock, a water tap, and a full complement of furniture including a couch with lots of cushions, a round dining table, rocking chairs, a brass bed, a dressing table with three mirrors, and a breakfast table under the window (Harrais n.d.:123-124). She admires the marvelous views and spectacular

scenery, appreciates having a big garden, discusses the irregularities of mail service, and describes her teaching duties and the well supplied school. She found it “better than Ohio’s antiquated school system” (Harrais n.d.:126). This shows that life in the small remote town could be as common and mundane as anyplace else, wherein children went to school, women attended meetings, chores were done, groceries were obtained, etc. But it also reflects differences that were unique to such a location such as the importance of getting mail as a way to stay connected to the outside world and family who were far away, and conflicts over personal freedom versus community rules, such as was the case in terms of temperance and who can determine or enforce morality.

In June 1927, Martin and Margaret Harrais began a three-month long horseback expedition into the upper Chitina country to Martin’s mining claims. Like other Alaskan women at the time, Margaret must have been quite tough to be willing to go on such a rugged adventure. It is clear from her writing that she enjoyed and appreciated the beauty of the wilderness and was proud of her ability to follow in her pioneering grandmother’s footsteps and adapt to the ways of the trail. As Margaret wrote:

If one is inclined to keep house in a laborious manner, it is a good thing to go out on the trail for awhile and find out just what constitutes the minimum essentials—one tin plate, knife, fork, spoon, and cup for each, a frying pan and two pails made from tin cans, for polite living; but even this can be abridged. Yes, almost anyone can go to housekeeping in Alaska. Really, three months in a camp five days removed from the source of supply make a lot that we do in town seem foolish (Harrais n.d.:139-140).

Margaret’s description of their five days on the trail to reach the mining camp and what they ate provides a glimpse into life in the Wrangell Mountains in the 1930s. Her experience is probably indicative of most miners at the time.



McCarthy school children raising and saluting the flag, circa 1926. Courtesy of Dick Anderson.



McCarthy school children in the schoolyard, circa 1926. Courtesy of Dick Anderson.

I can cook at home or in the permanent mining camp and pack into bags enough food to last us five days on the trail. These bags are carried on the saddles by a system which we have worked out. When we arrive at the camping place, I start the fire with small wood while Martin unpacks the horses. While he chops a supply of fire wood and takes care of the horses, I prepare the dinner—meat and gravy warmed up, macaroni and cheese ditto, rice, potatoes boiled in their jackets, tea or coffee, and candy or nut cookies for dessert. Not all this at one meal, but this is the variety of food carried (Ibid:158).

The upper Chitina valley from McCarthy to the Chitina Glacier had first been investigated by Fred Moffit of the US Geological Survey in 1915, and Moffit's report of copper signs between Copper Creek and the glacier is what enticed Harrais to stake claims up there in 1926 (Hunt 1996:190). They built a cabin, which Margaret referred to as their "dear little home in the wilderness" (Harrais, n.d.:145). Martin worked on his claims on Margaret Creek by blasting the canyon walls and running drifts into the limestone.

For the next six years, Harrais worked and developed the Darling M. nos. 1 through 5 load claims, blasting out five tunnels sites, as far as thirty feet. He was granted a patent to his claims in 1936, the same year he died. Ownership of the five Darling M. claims went to his wife, Margaret (Ringsmuth 2012a:134).

Martin Harrais also built a reservoir and aqueduct to bring in the necessary water, and constructed a rudimentary airstrip (later known as Hubert's Landing) by removing some of the biggest boulders. While Martin mined, Margaret continued to teach school in McCarthy and spent summers at the mine where she also enjoyed exploring the country by hiking and horseback riding. Once it was possible to fly, Margaret chose this option for travel between McCarthy and the camp. Harold Gillam was often the pilot and, according to Margaret, the flight from McCarthy took forty minutes (Harrais n.d.:162-163). This was preferable to five days of grueling travel by horseback which previously had been the only way to get to the Upper Chitina.

Although living far away from the elements of "civilization," the Harraises, like other remote miners of the time, tried to maintain the appearance of life as normal. For example, remaining loyal Americans, they still recognized the Fourth of July holiday, although in a somewhat unique, but imaginative fashion:

For Fourth of July observance, we ceremoniously nailed the National Colors to a long, slender spruce pole and erected it with fitting ceremony. The "colors" were only a red bandanna, a white dish towel, and the back of a blue shirt; but they floated just as bravely and gave as fine a thrill as the silkiest flag of finest craft (Harrais n.d.:146).

Many miners living hand to mouth in the remote Wrangell Mountains were spared some of the harshest effects of the Great Depression. They lived a simple lifestyle close to the land where they could hunt and fish for food and had fewer expenses, they operated in a cash or gold nugget only world, they did not earn enough to have any savings or investments, or they were too far away from the nearest bank to make any deposits. However, some, like Kennecott miners and employees who earned a steady income, had been able to get ahead and had savings and investments. They felt the full impact of the Depression just like any other citizen. For example, the Harraises lost all their savings when a Seattle bank failed and they lost all their investment in property when their tenants could no longer pay the rent (Ibid). Not being able to make enough money, Martin was forced to give

up mining and they moved to Cordova where he worked at a lumber mill and she taught school at Ellamar, on the coast between Cordova and Valdez where the Ellamar Copper Mine had been.⁵ After moving to Valdez, Martin Harrais served as the local US Commissioner (1934-1936), the president of the Valdez Igloo of Pioneers of Alaska, and a member of the University of Alaska's Board of Regents (1936) (Bleakley 2006:49). He died in 1936, and Margaret succeeded him as US Commissioner at Valdez. US Commissioners had responsibilities similar to judges, and in some communities also conducted investigations, officiated weddings, settled civil disagreements, and served as postmaster (Naske 1985, 1998). As a commissioner, Margaret Harrais was outspoken about their pay structure, advocating for change from the fee-based structure, which was seen by some as susceptible to corruption and did not provide enough income to live off of. She supported receiving a regular salary (Naske 1998:122). Margaret Harrais was a remarkable woman ahead of her time, not only in her rural teaching and helping her husband at their upper Chitina mine, but also in the valuable contributions she made to education, civic life, legal affairs, and charities in Valdez and the rest of Alaska until her death in 1964 (Munsey 1975).

Upon Margaret's death, the Darling M mining claims were bequeathed to her favorite charity, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, which in 1970 granted them to Malcolm Frazier of Anchorage who was married to Margaret's niece. After many years in the Frazier family, in 1988 the property was sold to Paul Claus, a wilderness guide and owner of Claus Outdoor Adventures. In 1960, Paul's father, John, homesteaded a nearby five acres along the upper Chitina River. Subsequently, there was a land exchange between the Claus family and the National Park Service so the mineral parcel that was in designated wilderness is no longer in private hands (Ringsmuth 2012a:134). In 1982, Paul Claus, and his wife Donna, made the area their permanent home and built the Ultima Thule Lodge (Ultima Thule Lodge 2016). While nuggets are no longer being pulled from the dirt, the land of the upper Chitina continues to reward the ardent adventurer willing to pit him or herself against the elements. In transforming an old mining camp and rustic log cabin to a world-class wilderness lodge, the Claus family has succeeded in providing life-affirming wilderness experiences to their visitors, and, similar to Margaret Harrais, they have found their own peace and inspiration from their wilderness home.

CHISANA DISTRICT

In 1913, discovery of gold near the headwaters of the Chisana River provoked Alaska's last major gold rush.⁶ This led to the sudden occupation of a previously unknown and wild part of Alaska, with a series of mining camps popping up and then establishment of the community of Johnson City. It was soon renamed Chisana City by postal officials, and currently is known just as Chisana. Typical of the boom and bust cycle of most mining activity, especially of that in the Wrangell-St. Elias area where besides Kennecott most of the mining locations have been relatively short-lived, these tent camps did not last long. However, Chisana City, nestled in a remote valley between the Nutzotin and Wrangell Mountains, was a classic frontier town composed of quickly assembled log buildings, wooden sidewalks, and dirt streets developed to support the miners out on the creeks. The permanent structures that housed stores, a post office, freight services, and accommodations, along with the availability of meals and entertainment helped make life for the miners easier, as well as provided opportunities for non-miners, including women, to benefit financially from the mining operations. One newspaper described Chisana City as the "largest log cabin town in the world" (Bleakley 2007:33).⁷ For a period, the mostly tent camp at Bonanza Creek began to look like a town as well, with a few cabins, stores, hotels, a restaurant, and even several women (Ibid:36). However, after a devastating flood in 1914 destroyed much of Bonanza Creek camp, miners moved into Chisana City for the winter, thereby solidifying its permanence as a settlement. In contrast to the camps on the creeks on nearby "Gold Hill," which came and went with the success or failure of a mining season, the town of Chisana flourished well past the peak of the mining operations. Unlike Kennecott and

McCarthy that were largely abandoned after the copper mine's closure, Chisana has continued to have at least one permanent resident non-stop throughout its history. With some of the buildings restored, Chisana has retained its mining identity even though the structures have since been put to other uses. Similar to Kennecott, the Chisana Gold Rush left a significant mark on the history of non-Native use of the Wrangell Mountains, as well as on the landscape itself, and left behind clear physical remains at Chisana, but given the remote location far from a road or easy access, most visitors probably are unaware of this.

In May 1913, Nels P. Nelson, Billy James and Matilda Wales made the first significant placer discovery near Chathenda Creek along a tributary stream that they called "Bonanza Creek." According to Bleakley, Nelson was born in Bleken, Sweden in March 1870 and probably served in the military before coming to Alaska in the 1890s. Although he was prospecting in the Fortymile country in 1896, Nelson failed to join the initial wave of stamperders up the Yukon River and therefore missed his greatest opportunity to strike it rich (Bleakley 2007:13). James also possessed extensive prospecting experience prior to arriving in the Chisana district. He had been a hard-rock miner in California before joining the Klondike stampede, and had subsequently worked in both the Fortymile and Fairbanks districts. "He was also extremely familiar with the White River country, having visited it regularly since about 1908" (Ibid). Some sources claim that a Native man known as Chisana Joe or Indian Joe noticed a quartz outcropping near the mouth of Bonanza Creek and mentioned it to Billy James (Capps 1916:92; Bleakley 2007:13). This information is perhaps what led James to explore the area. It was after this that James and Wales made the significant find upstream on Eldorado Creek that is claimed to have led to the Chisana Gold Rush including miners from Dawson being the first to have heard of the strike. Carl Whitham, who later developed the Nabesna Mine, was also on the scene early and acquired the second claim on Little Eldorado.

The newly completed Copper River and Northwestern Railway, which ran to McCarthy and Kennecott less than a hundred miles away from the major strike, made access to the area easier and contributed to so many people rushing to the area. Records indicate that anywhere from 2,000 to 8,000 prospectors participated during the height of the rush (Bleakley 2007:6). Nevertheless, trails to the Chisana District remained difficult and not all prospectors were properly prepared. Many lacked adequate supplies, clothing, and food. Access from the north via the Tanana River and then up the White River first thought to be the best route proved nearly impassible by boat (Cole 1979). A winter and summer trail was blazed by Canadians from Canyon City on the White River near the international border to Beaver Creek, over the divide to Chathenda Creek, and then on to Chisana City (Cairnes 1915). The walking trail up the Chitistone River through Skolai Pass was the most direct but risky due to the steep terrain of the so-called "goat trail" through Chitistone Canyon. Later, George Hazelet established a route across the Nizina and Chisana Glaciers, now known as the Hazelet Trail, including a "roadhouse" at the summit, and then a longer but safer trail was established up Skolai Creek.

Another popular way to get to Chisana from the Copper River valley was from the Nabesna side. Lieutenant Henry Allen noted in the report of his 1885 expedition up the Copper River, that there was an Indian trail from Batzulnetas Village to the White River Valley via the Chisana River. In 1899, prospectors E. J. Cooper and H. A. Hammond are believed to be the first to bring a pack train along this old Indian trail through Cooper Pass to Chisana (Cole 1979:8). "This route from the Copper and Nabesna valleys to the Chisana was later an important overland route during the Chisana gold stampede" (Ibid:5). Harry Boyden used this as his main winter freight and mail trail between Chisana and Nabesna. Cole Ellis describes Boyden's route:

You go down Nabesna River and then you go up Cooper's Pass. You go right to the top and Cooper's Pass is probably five thousand or 4,800 feet, something like that. That was his hardest part of the journey. Of course, getting across the Nabesna River was



James Camp, Little Eldorado No. 1, Chisana District, circa 1910. John Byram Collection. Courtesy of Dick Anderson and the National Park Service.

tough, too. In different times of year. And he had the Chisana River to cross. So he had two major rivers to cross and he had that pass, which in the wintertime when it gets ice and overflow in it, it's treacherous to get up over it. He worked for his money, no doubt about it. Man, it was only fifty miles but I'll bet it felt like more. He had one line shack on this side of the pass where he could rest and have shelter. That's all fallen down now, except for the roof. And then on the other side there's a little creek, Star Creek, where there were several miner cabins he could use. But he had every bit of forty some miles before he got to any easy going at all. He worked for it every inch of the way (C. & L. Ellis 1993).

Among the various early claims in the area, the Little Eldorado Claim No. 1 produced the most significant quantities of gold. After first sluicing on July 4, 1913, "by August 2 they had already garnered \$9,000, or an average of about \$300 per day" (Bleakley 2007:15). Hand-mining methods were used since the gravel was less than six feet thick and the remote location made it difficult to bring in machinery. This meant a minimal investment in equipment and labor were needed so that more of the gold discovered could go into profit rather than paying expenses as would have happened with a larger-scale operation. Creek mining and sluicing as was being done in the Chisana area required diversion of water from one side of a canyon to the other to access exposed gravel and either use of a canvas hose or an elaborate system of raised wooden channels, called flumes, to bring water into the sluice boxes. This led to quite a bit of disruption of the natural environment, and photos from the time show piles of rock, gravel and overburden and dug out creek bottoms covered in a network of man-made dams, ditches, flumes and sluice boxes. There is evidence of a few mine shafts being sunk to access minerals below the surface but they did not prove especially successful (Ibid:45).



Horse pack train along the Goat Trail above the Chitstone River on the trail to Chisana, circa 1927. Alaska State Library, Alaska Road Commission Photograph Collection, J.P. Hubrick, ASL-P61-004-198.

With the excitement over this new gold rush and the number of prospectors involved, Chisana is a district whose history is marked by people staking “wildcat claims” and jumping someone else’s claim (Ibid:25). No mining area was immune to conflict and disagreement over ownership of claims. The stakes were high when it meant the difference between fortune and ruin for a man who had put everything he had into this venture. As previous mining opportunities around Alaska declined, Chisana provided a new opportunity for individual miners to make their fortune. With the attitude that this might be their last chance, “all three early discoverers and many early stampeders spent the remainder of their lives in the district, eking out small but consistent incomes while continuously searching for that one last strike” (Ibid:7). How long miners stayed is one way in which the Chisana Gold Rush differed from other stampedes. Some remained well into the 1930s by which time the rush was long over.

As with similar remote stampedes, the life for a miner was not easy. Accidents were an ever present danger, whether from mine shaft cave-ins, rocks falling, explosions, cuts from axes or knives, or equipment crushing fingers or limbs. With little medical care available, illness or infection took the lives of many. Others drowned while trying to cross glacial torrents or falling through the ice while traveling to or from the mining district. Others starved to death as provisions were hard to come by even after reaching the main mining area. There was the threat of bears surprising you on the trail or coming into camp, which required vigilance and having the proper weapon for protection. And in the summer there was the constant harassment from mosquitoes while in the winter either the cold or darkness or both could cut a life short.

To be a successful prospector it helped to have knowledge not only of how to dig a hole, pan and sluice, and identify gold nuggets, but also how to travel in wild country without a trail and to navigate ice conditions, how to pack a horse and decide which were the most important types of items needed, and how to hunt and fish to sustain oneself when provisions were not available for

purchase. A number of miners who wintered over became trappers as another way to earn a living. For example, in the winter of 1929/1930, Joe Davis and Sid Johnston were two such miners who actively trapped out of Chisana (Mishler and Simeone 2006:29 & 41).⁸

While it was critical that you could survive on your own, it was also important for people to be neighborly and willing to help out others in need, like when your neighbor's cabin caught fire, you needed help hauling in a load of firewood or your axe sharpened, or to help when a medical emergency or death occurred. Even in the summer, creek mining, as was done in Chisana, was cold work; whether you were standing in the cold water all day as you dug up gravel, or your hands were immersed while running water through a pan or sluice box. These miners had to have strong backs for all the digging and tough constitutions for putting up with the wet and cold and poor living conditions. Although life in 1913 in other parts of the United States had become quite sophisticated with "modern amenities," the life of a miner in remote Alaska remained one of the toughest ways to make a living.

One of the characters in the early days of mining in Chisana was Fletcher T. Hamshaw who had heard of the strike while mining for copper on the upper White River. Like miners' wives on Dan Creek, Hamshaw's wife, Margaret, joined him in camp. Hamshaw has been described as quite the aggressive businessman whose main focus was to make as much money as possible. For example, he was not so popular among other miners for his method of acquiring claims by having his employees stake new claims and then buying them for himself (Ibid:24). George Hazelet was another early arrival whose claims proved less prosperous so he turned his attention to locating a townsite in order to build a community to support the mining. His initial site of Woodrow proved too far from the main mining, so in September 1913, seventy-five miners met near the mouth of Chathenda Creek, organized the Chathenda Mining District and established Johnson City (Bleakley 2007:29). The townsite grew to include 200 cabins, grocery stores, the district recording office and a post office, and as previously mentioned was renamed Chisana City. Anthony J. "Tony" Dimond of Valdez was selected as their new US Commissioner.

Similar to other small mining communities, as Chisana grew it began to include a diverse group of residents, including women, and to provide more amenities. By the end of 1913, when Dimond arrived, a Red Cross hospital, barber shops, restaurants, a hotel, a boarding house, and a saloon called the "Miner's Home" had already been added to the town (Ibid:31). It was beginning to look and feel like a permanent settlement with larger buildings being added. At least one, Sam Shucklin's clothing store, even had glass windows. Other store keepers included Charles Simon, who operated a store from 1914 until his death in 1929, and Herman Kessler, who also traded at what is now the village of Northway. Unlike some other mining in the Wrangell Mountains, some of the Chisana prospectors continued to mine during the cold and snowy winter months, so the town needed to function all year round. The extensive photographic record of these early years in Chisana shows a town with at least two streets, many log buildings, dog teams and horses traveling around town, and residents actively going about the business of their daily lives (Bleakley 2007). It looks just like any other frontier town of its time. You would have no idea it was a rough one hundred miles from its nearest neighbor. Seattle reporter Grace Bostwick, who arrived in Chisana City in the spring of 1914 and was one of the district's first female residents, describes it as follows:

The camp is fast assuming the airs and ways of a town. Men mostly shave now, where formerly they were rough and bearded. They are also more particular about their clothing. The most interesting period of the camp...the pioneer days...when one after another of the first cabins were built, when delicacies of any sort were absolutely unknown, and when magazines and books were prizes eagerly longed for are past... There are by this time two bath tubs in the place, as there are brooms, tea kettles, and many other luxuries formerly unknown. It only remains for the eagerly anticipated strike to materialize, in which event the camp will become a bona fide town with great

rapidity, even though it is said to be the most inaccessible camp yet started in Alaska (as quoted in Bleakley 2007:36).⁹

The facilities at Bonanza Creek and at Henshaw's elaborate camp at his larger-scale operation at the mouth of Eldorado Creek offered miners out on the creeks in the Chisana district quite a number of opportunities for meals, supplies, bathing, and accommodations that may not have been as available in the smaller stampedes previously mined around the Wrangell-St. Elias area. Given the difficulty of bringing food and supplies into Chisana by dog team or pack horse, items were expensive and gold dust was the preferred currency. By 1929, when mining was on the decline, prices got so high that it was difficult to keep expenses low enough so that you still could live on just a dollar a day as had been possible during the height of the gold rush (Mishler and Simeone 2006:42). Wood, whether as lumber or for firewood, was in short supply as trees did not grow near the mines. On average, in 1913 and 1914, miners who were not working their own claims but were employed on a larger sluicing operation were paid five to six dollars a day. This did not give them much money to spend in town, especially if they were sending money home to support a family or pay off debt incurred by coming to Alaska. But these men certainly would have come in periodically from the mines to have a break from the grim conditions. They might enjoy a drink, a hot meal, a warm bath, a comfortable bed, and perhaps the company of a prostitute.

As previously stated, transportation to the Chisana district was difficult and made locally purchased supplies and food especially expensive. In summer, supplies arrived by pack horse from McCarthy. It was about an eighty-mile trip that typically took six days. In 1919, though, George Young mentions meeting Shorty Gwin who had eight pack horses that he used to freight between McCarthy and Chisana and that it was a two-week trip (Young 1947:92). In the winter, dog teams hauled the freight in on sleds. Rates for winter freight tended to be a bit lower at twenty cents per pound compared with summer rates of twenty-five cents per pound to Chisana and an additional nickel for delivery to the creeks (Ibid:59). On the measly salary paid a miner, these were high prices to pay. Bill Berry, Fred Youngs and Sidney "Too Much" Johnston were some of the men who did a lot of the freighting, as did Harry Boyden who also had the contract from the postal service for carrying the mail.¹⁰ Harry Boyden is reported to have said that transporting bacon to Chisana to sell was his biggest money maker. As Cole Ellis explained in an oral history interview:

The miners would pay more for bacon than anything else. Just crazy for it, you know. So he said that was the main money. You know, sugar and tea and salt and all that was good, but that was the first thing they'd always ask, if he brought bacon, you know. And it came from a long ways. He was getting his bacon in Valdez, so they had to bring it through boat from wherever it came up from there and bring it on to Chisana. It was mostly by horseback he was bringing it. He'd tell about packing it nice, and keep it from ruining. In the wintertime, he used the dogs, so then he didn't have to worry about stuff like that. He could freeze all it wanted, but he said he made good money at it (C. & L. Ellis 1993).

Typical of the time when multiple jobs were required for someone to sustain a living in the region, Boyden also worked as a guide, was a trapper, and later became the caretaker at the Nabesna Mine. Joe McClelland and Bill Maher also have been mentioned as Chisana mail carriers in 1920 (McGuire 1921:52). And in 1929, Robert McKennan mentions asking Tommy Jackson to carry a load from Chisana to Nabesna, a distance of about forty miles, and the prevailing freight rate being five cents a pound (Mishler and Simeone 2006:47). "I don't see how anybody is going to get rich at this business, for a dog sled has but a limited capacity" (Ibid:47-48). With the introduction of the airplane

and construction of an airstrip in 1929, gaining access to Chisana suddenly became cheaper, but by this time most of the mining activity had ceased. As late as the 1950s, when new mining cropped up around Chisana, heavy equipment was brought in, mostly by walking a Caterpillar tractor, or “Cat” for short, across frozen rivers and lakes in the winter time, hauling sled loads of fuel, supplies and equipment like suction dredges. It remained a grueling ordeal. Ivan Thorall describes the March trip he made with Iver Johnson in the mid-1950s as follows:

On the back sled we had a little plywood shack that was just big enough for a bunk and a little stove. We had one bunk over the other. I had the upper one. It lacked two or three inches of being long enough for me. But I made it through. I was the cook. Iver had his bunk arranged so in the morning he could just go over and start a fire in the stove without getting out of bed. It was pretty cold yet. It was still kind of the winter. That darn stove got so hot that I had to get up; I couldn't stay in bed anymore. You know, we worked 18 to 20 hours a day. I didn't get much sleep with that damned Iver starting a fire so early in the morning. Then I'd have to get out and get up and start the coffee going (Thorall 2006:AAF-9405).

Instead of hauling material and supplies in on the ground like Thorall and Johnson did, which was time consuming and risky, some miners built their own remote airstrips in order to more easily access their claims.

As in any booming mining town, Chisana was ripe for entrepreneurial opportunity. One creative businessman was Louis K. Schonborn, who previously had operated a hotel in Dawson City, and established a second-hand business in Chisana reselling outfits that he purchased from stampeders who had gone bust and had to leave the country. He was found shot in December 1914, thereby becoming the district's only recorded murder (Bleakley 2007:48). It just goes to show that the Wild West attitude of life on the frontier lived on among the miners. It was a tough and dangerous place to be where disagreements might be solved at the end of the barrel of a gun.¹¹ Ivan Thorall suggests that N.P. Nelson and Billy James came to their agreement over mining claims at the end of the barrel of Nelson's rifle pointed at James (Thorall 2006:AAF-9404).

After Alaska became part of the United States in 1867, there was no formal legal system until the Organic Act of May 17, 1884 provided for a limited civil government in the territory. A federal judicial system was established that included appointment of commissioners in the more remote regions (Naske 1985, 1998). While Schonborn's murder was the first recorded in the Chisana district, it probably was not the first, nor the last, that occurred throughout the Wrangell-St. Elias area. The more common types of crime during this period were likely theft, drunkenness, disorderly conduct, fighting, or claim jumping. The question remains how effective was this commissioner-based system of justice and who was out policing the trails, the mining camps, and the isolated towns. In the early years of the Klondike Gold Rush, there was a lack of North-West Mounted Police on the Canadian side (Kirchhoff 2017), which leads to the question of who was enforcing the laws within Alaska at the time. Were laws just ignored in these remote places, or did residents take it upon themselves to “arrest” their fellow citizens? There are descriptions of US Commissioners holding hearings and people being put in jail, especially in other parts of Alaska (Naske 1998; Barrett 2002), but there is little information in the published literature about the history of criminal activity and justice in the Wrangell-St. Elias region during different time periods, and how safe citizens felt. Of course, the justice system changed as time went on: the federal system was changed from commissioners to district judges (Naske 1998); as the region grew more populated, law enforcement officers were assigned to road system communities; and with Alaska statehood in 1959, a state judicial system was established thereby adding another layer of regulation (Naske 1985).

There also were at least a few women in Chisana during the height of the gold rush, including Matilda Wales who helped find the original gold prospect, as well as wives of miners. Of course these women took care of the cooking and cleaning in their homes, but some of them also worked to help support the often not very lucrative lifestyle of their mining husbands. For instance, in 1922 Sidney Johnston's wife, Luella, helped her husband work a claim on Pan Creek, and then served as postmistress in Chisana from 1929 to 1938. Similar to McCarthy and the camp at Dan Creek, Chisana had a community atmosphere that provided socializing and amenities that made life more pleasant for these women than life on the creeks would have been. In addition, given that Chisana was swarming with single men coming in from the creeks, it is likely that there were some woman available on whom to spend their new found fortunes.

Eventually, things began to slow down at Chisana. By the end of the 1914 season, many discoveries were not proving as fruitful as had been promoted or hoped for, and heavy rains and flooding in August disrupted activity or destroyed mining equipment. By 1915, Chisana had shrunk, although "it still contained at least eighteen businesses, including lodging houses, saloons, and stores" (Bleakley 2007:49), and continued to have a US Commissioner stationed there to maintain law and order, oversee registration of claims, and assess the value of mineral products. However, gold production was down from previous years, employment at the mines declined, and many miners left the area. Only about fifty miners continued to be strongly devoted to the potential for big strike in the district and stayed that winter in Chisana. Fred Best was one of the early miners who stayed on after the main rush and wintered at Chisana. In the winter, he would trap and hunt, visit with friends either in Chisana or at Bonanza City, and play cards. "Only once or twice a year did he bother to travel across the Wrangell Mountains to the more urban community of McCarthy, and such journeys were never easy" (Ibid:53). The trail was narrow and in places had very steep drop-offs, the snow was deep, and the weather could be bad with nearly zero visibility.

With the onset of World War I, as in other parts of Alaska, mining activity and the population of Chisana declined. A number of miners left to join the military, such as Fred Best who joined the Navy, and Carl Whitham who enlisted in the Army, but others remained, including Andy Taylor, Jim Murie, Don Greene, Fred Nelson, Jack Carroll, Dud McKinney, Al Wright, and Charles Simons. Andy Taylor also was a guide and Charles Simons was the postmaster and a merchant. The rest were still determined that Chisana would produce a wealth of gold for them either from the creeks or from associated business enterprises. In 1920, census taker George Walker reported only 148 residents in the Chisana vicinity, 43 of them being non-Native. This included "the U.S. commissioner [sic], a merchant, a trader, a blacksmith, a cook, two trappers, three freighters, ten prospectors, seventeen placer miners, and six wives or children" (Bleakley 2007:57). By the late 1930s, Chisana was practically a ghost town.

Although Chisana itself was smaller, some mining continued on the creeks. Mining even continued for some men who were not even there. For example, Carl Whitham who had staked one of the early claims on Little Eldorado and was doing well there and on Skookum Creek wanted to serve in the Army during World War I. Another prospector, Joe Davis, who was originally from eastern Europe, made a deal with Carl to mine his claims and they would split the recovered amount by an agreed upon percentage (Thorall 2006:AAF-9404). Gentlemen's agreements like this were not unusual within the mining community. Many early mining partnerships were formed this way. The one between Joe and Carl worked out all right, but this was not the case with the partnership between N.P. Nelson and Billy James. They ended up going to court over the ownership and profit sharing of the original Chisana discovery claims on Eldorado Creek (Thorall 2006:AAF-9404).

One of the impacts of the mining and development around Bonanza Creek was the abandonment of Cross Creek Village (*Nach'itay Cheeg* in the upper Tanana language, literally "game trail across mouth"), an Indian community about nine miles from Chisana on the other side of the Chisana River (Simeone 2014:60-62; Reckord 1983b; Easton n.d.). Also known as Notch Creek Village, occupancy

is believed to predate the discovery of gold at Chisana (Reckord 1983b:238; Easton n.d.). Native subsistence opportunities were impacted by competition from so many miners hunting for food in the same area. "By spring 1914, local prospectors had consumed about 2,000 Dall sheep, virtually eliminating them from the vicinity" (Capps 1916:21; Bleakley 2007:37). Eventually, the Natives living in Cross Creek Village moved out and abandoned their traditional home.

"The gold rush attracted Native people from Cross Creek, Scottie Creek, and Cooper Creek on the Nabesna, who came to trade furs and buy supplies. They were also active in the freighting business, delivering mail, panning for gold, and selling meat" (Simeone 2014:62). Some ended up in Chisana City, attracted by the promise of cash labor, and many of them became market hunters, including Jake Butler, Houston Sanford, Frank Sanford, Fred John Sr. and Johnny Nicolai (Ibid). In 1929, Joe Justin (known as Chisana Joe), an Ahtna Native who was one of these market hunters, is said to have killed six sheep and two bear on a four-day hunting trip and sold the meat for 25 cents a pound (Mishler and Simeone 2006:32).

In contrast, Lavell Wilson states that market hunting for the mines was in direct competition with Native hunting:

When they had the Chisana gold strike and the Nabesna mine, there were a lot of market hunters over there to supply meat for the mines. The Natives living over there at Cross Creek and Cooper Creek had a hard time because these market hunters were killing a lot of the game that they normally would have hunted (Wilson 2008).

In 1920, there were around 100 Native people living at Chisana out of a total population of about 150 (Mishler and Simeone 2006:154 & n11; Bleakley 2007:57). In the 1930s, a few Ahtna or Upper Tanana worked the mines, including Chisana Joe (Joe Justin) and Jack John Justin (Bleakley 2007:62). By this time, Chisana also contained a substantial Native community, "with several cabins grouped just northeast of the airstrip" (Simeone 2014:63), whose residents were involved in activities supporting mining. Following a tradition of mobility, the local Natives combined hunting and trapping at seasonal subsistence camps with living in town where they took advantage of wage labor opportunities. People moved between the villages at Cross Creek, Cooper Creek and Chisana mixing their traditional lifestyle with periods of working for non-Natives in order to earn enough money to buy basic supplies like flour, tea, and sugar (Reckord 1983b; Mishler and Simeone 2006; Simeone 2014).

From September 1929 until June 1930, anthropologist Robert McKennan visited what is now the eastern edge of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, including the terminus of Russell Glacier, head of the White River, Solo Creek pack trail, Beaver Creek and its tributary Carl Creek, the Chisana area, Cooper Creek and the upper Nabesna River (Mishler and Simeone 2006). He lived in Chisana from September until November 1929, when he moved to a village 40 miles away located near the Nabesna River at the mouth of Cooper Creek, which he refers to in his diary as Nabesna.¹² In February, he moved to the village now known as Northway and lived there until April 1930 when he began his journey towards Fairbanks. Although McKennan's main purpose was to study the Natives of the region, his field journals provide interesting observations of life in Chisana in the fall of 1929. By this time, Chisana was a former gold mining hub past its prime but with a few remaining residents still trying to hang onto the glory days. The population that year was seven people (six men and one woman). Despite the small population the community still had regular monthly mail service from Chitina, something not available to everyone else in the region. Perhaps this was due to its mostly non-Native population. However, when the main trader in Chisana, Charles Simons, died in the fall of 1929, there were not enough residents left to justify continued commercial support to the community. After this, Chisana could hardly be called a community when it was just a handful of individuals living there without any commercial or business enterprise.

McKenna describes a community, although small in size, rich in social drama. Life was difficult, cold and dirty. There was a significant amount of caribou, moose, sheep and ptarmigan hunting to provide meat on the table, and trapping of furs to trade for goods and supplies that could not otherwise be purchased due to poor mining returns. The small population, the close living quarters, and the stresses of the lifestyle including mining accidents where men were injured or killed, sometimes strained relationships. There was distrust and suspicion. There was lying, cheating, and stealing. Even members of the same family sometimes were not on speaking terms (Ibid:25). And, of course, there was gossip. However, as in other mining towns, there was a lot of visiting between residents in the isolating winter months. McKenna regularly had people dropping by his cabin for a visit and cup of tea, and mentions reading and intellectual discussion as another form of entertainment among residents. The monthly mail service delivered by dog team in the winter and horses in the summer not only brought mail, but also newspapers, magazines and books.¹³ Specifically, he viewed Tony McGettigan as “the most intellectually minded man in camp” (Ibid:31). McKenna also mentions attending evening gatherings of the “Fireside League” at Simons’ store, where men discussed current topics, listened to music, and on a special occasion might smoke a cigar. This provides further evidence that life in these small mining towns ran deeper than just digging dirt and doing the basic chores of life, such as collecting and splitting firewood, cooking, doing laundry, going hunting, or stirring the sourdough pot. His journal entry for October 4, 1929 states:

Religion was the topic tonight and Dud McKinney, Frank Mace, and Joe Davis were hard at it. It was most interesting. Joe Davis, in broken English (he is Croatian) graphically explained purgatory. He likened man to a dirty, greasy old frying pan and then pointed out that the way to clean it was to put it on a hot fire and burn it bright (Ibid:29).¹⁴

When McKenna was in Chisana, airplanes were already flying into the Wrangell Mountains area, although not yet on a regular basis. Air travel was expensive and remained out of reach for most residents at the time, but airplanes immensely changed the flavor of the community from what it was in the Gold Rush period when the only way in or out was by foot, horse, or dog team. McKenna’s description of the excitement and disruption brought on by the arrival of an airplane for an emergency medical evacuation really shows the novelty of such an event and demonstrates how important contact with the outside world was, even for the hardy folk of Chisana. Although McKenna does not specifically say it in his journal, this was most likely one of the first airplanes to land in Chisana, since the airstrip had only been built by Gus Johnson earlier in 1929. Few pilots risked using the 1,500 feet long by 150 feet wide strip, because it was a rough dirt field and the unpredictable mountain weather made it dangerous (Ringsmuth 2012a:6). According to McKenna, while waiting for a plane to arrive one day in October, men did not go hunting far from home, they did not go out to the creeks to take down their equipment for the winter, and they did not venture out to set up their winter camp and trapline (Ibid). When the plane finally arrived the next day, “all Chisana dropped what they were doing and rushed to the field. ...The excitement cost me a batch of burned biscuits but it was cheap at that price” (Ibid:30). In these early stages, air travel remained unreliable and expensive. In 1930, the cost of chartering a plane from Copper Center to Chisana was \$150, and the added cost of freight ranged from 35 to 40 cents a pound (Pilgrim 1930:5). It was a two hour flight via Nabesna and Cooper Pass (Ibid:4). For most people, this was out of their price range so they continued to use the old, slower, and cheaper means of ground transportation. Chisana remained fairly isolated until regular air service started in 1932 (Ringsmuth 2012a:6).

Chisana is an interesting case in that it is a mining district that has operated and been occupied nearly continuously in some form or another since its beginning. While the old buildings of the Kennecott Mine are still standing and can be visited, most of the buildings are no longer occupied. A

few old home structures remain on the periphery that are still being lived in by local residents, but for the most part Kennecott has not remained a constantly occupied community or had continued mining going on around it in the same way as Chisana. After construction of the Chisana airstrip and the start of regular flights by pilots like Bob Reeve and later Cordova Airlines, construction of the Nabesna Road from the Richardson Highway to the Nabesna River in 1934 was the next big thing that facilitated transportation to Chisana and cut down on costs. This led to revitalization of some Chisana mining, but it was short-lived as the market was just not there and the claims were not very productive.

With the onset of World War II and the imposition of War Production Board Order L-208 in 1942, the US government ordered all gold mining ceased as it was considered a non-essential war-time industry. All private gold mines shut down, including those around Chisana. Some of the smaller ones employing five or fewer men were allowed to continue, although most did not. Many of the miners were getting too old and needed a crew of younger men, which was not available. Anthony McGettigan, originally from Ireland who had been US Commissioner from 1914 to 1920 and postmaster until 1937, was the exception. At age 75, he continued to operate the Bonanza No. 12 mine until he disappeared one spring while hiking (Bleakley 2007:66). His strength and determination to not let age slow him down exemplifies the miners of his time. They would not stop.

After the war, some mining continued but more at the mining company level, with the establishment of the Bonanza Mining Company, the Earl Hirst-Harry Sutherland partnership, and the Nutzotin Placer Company. "All of Gold Hill's original mining claims lapsed during the 1950s, but most were relocated during the following decade" (Ibid:68). In the 1950s, interest in the area perked up again. Iver Johnson was a Cat skinner (i.e., bulldozer operator) from Fairbanks who with two friends got gold fever and decided to give Chisana a try. Iver brought equipment in to prospect at Chicken and Glacier Creeks. In March, Ivan Thorall helped Iver haul three sleds of equipment and fuel barrels by Cat train from the Alaska Highway at Dry Creek into Beaver Creek.¹⁵ As Ivan Thorall explained this was not an easy endeavor:

When I first went in with Iver that first time, we had a little over twenty barrels of diesel oil. And we had a barrel or two of gasoline. And I think we had 50 gallons of lube oil. That was quite a struggle. In the wintertime, everything's so slick. With those 50 gallon barrels. A barrel of diesel oil or a barrel of crankcase oil weighs more than gasoline, and a barrel of gasoline isn't light. The barrels sat on the sled on end. And then we used cables and chains with chain binders to lash everything down. That was one of the big problems was keeping that stuff on the sled. Not only keeping it from sliding around on the sled, but keeping it all together. And everything was slick. Only one time we unloaded the sled by accident. We were going up Beaver Creek by Lamb's Pass over into the Horsfeld country. It was not only steep but we came to an extra steep place. That was the heaviest sled. The only way we could get it up there was to winch it up. We got it about half way up and the winch line cut into the spool of line that was wrapped on the winch, and when that cut in why it'd only give it about two inches of slack. We unloaded the whole shebang right on the hillside. Right in the snow. And there's nothing slicker than a 50 gallon barrel of diesel oil when it's covered with snow. Then we had to manhandle that stuff back onto the sled at the top (Thorall 2006:AAF-9405).

Ivan Thorall was born in Mapleton, Oregon on March 16, 1913. He served in the Civilian Conservation Corps and worked as a logger in Oregon before coming to Alaska in 1940. In Alaska, he worked in logging, trapping, mining and construction. When World War II started, Ivan enlisted and



Tractor freighting supplies on sleds from Chitina to Nabesna Mine, February 1933. Walter W. Hodge Papers, UAF-2003-63-301, Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

was stationed at Ladd Field, now Fort Wainwright. After the war, Ivan proved up on three homesteads, one on Badger Road near Fairbanks, another on the upper Chena River, and his last was in Chisana where he did his mining. Ivan also served on the Alaska Fish and Game Board from 1971 to 1976, including serving as chairman, and was active and influential in establishing the Alaska resident dip net fishery in Chitina. He learned to fly when he was 76, shot his last moose at age 88, flew his plane until he was 90, and drove until he was 94. He was known for his quiet and kind manner, generosity, impeccable honesty, and his sense of humor. Ivan Thorall died in January 2009 at age 95.¹⁶

Ivan originally just did the freight trip with Iver as a job and to help out, and was not interested in mining. This eventually changed. Iver Johnson and Ivan Thorall did some mining together and later Ivan continued on his own. Eventually, they build an airstrip on a bar of Chicken Creek in order to fly future supplies in. As Ivan Thorall explains, transportation was as critical to mining in the 1950s as it was in the early 1900s:

We just leveled it out. Although it's a pretty steep hillside. About a 5% grade. We got a good useable airstrip there. We did that for our mining operation. We had to get our supplies in there somehow. We either had to drag it in with a Cat or fly it in, so we decided it was cheaper to fly it in. Floyd Miller had an air taxi service at Northway at that time. And he was a very good pilot and had a good plane, so we built that little airstrip there on Chicken Creek and he did all of our flying (Thorall 2006:AAF-9404).

Iver and Ivan's efforts did not produce much. Most of the good ground in the Bonanza Creek area had already been worked multiple times and there was nothing left for them. Despite this setback, Ivan Thorall remained associated with Chisana. He helped build a larger airstrip at Chisana in 1956

for Cordova Air, and later did some prospecting at Gold Hill. In the late 1960s, Ivan grew oats, hay and clover on his 130-acre homestead in Chisana. As he said, "It's unbelievable what you can grow in Chisana if you do it right" (Thorall 2006:AAF-9403). He remained a regular resident of the community, traveling back and forth to Fairbanks with his own airplane, and continued to try his hand at mining until the formation of the national park.

As with other mining in the region, Chisana mining was affected by establishment of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve in 1980. The Gold Hill area is located within the preserve boundaries. Despite all the rules and regulations and court cases, Ivan Thorall attempted to continue to mine. "I will continue with my prospecting as it pollutes nothing and bothers nobody and will prove of value if and when all the lawsuits and legal maneuvers are over" (Thorall quoted in Bleakley 2007:71). Unfortunately, things did not go as well for Ivan as he hoped:

As you probably already know, most of the ground here has been worked, intermittently, since 1913 and is not considered very valuable. One exception being a half mile or so of Gold Run Creek which has not been worked and may contain from three to five thousand ounces of placer gold. At my age, 68, it is too deep and costly a venture for me to play around with. The rest of my ground I had hoped to work to supplement my social security benefits. I had my Gold Run claims sold when all the withdrawals hit us and the deal fell through. I doubt now that I could give them away at any price but would like to hang on for another year or two just in case things change for the better. This was going to be my first year with more income than outgo (Thorall quoted in Bleakley 2007:69).

Around 1980, Howard Fix, who lives near Northway, Alaska, joined Thorall in a suction dredge mining venture at Gold Run on Gold Hill. "It was pretty good gold up there. I could get an ounce and a half in thirty minutes with a dredge, and back then, you know, gold was I think \$140 or somethin' like that" (Fix 2014). David James, who also lives near Northway, teamed up with Howard Fix and some other friends to try out small-scale prospecting in the Chisana district as another way to try to earn some money. He explained that he and his partners ended up buying the claims from Thorall and moved a couple of Caterpillar D-4 dozers in there by walking them up the river in the spring of 1980 or 1981.¹⁷ There was not enough water to support the dredge operation and the claims just did not prove worthwhile in the long run. So typical of many small-scale miners in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, "I spent a bunch of money on it, and it just wasn't practical" (James 2015). Or as his wife, Moya, added, "Wasn't profitable at all" (Ibid). Also typical of miners, this did not deter Howard. He was bitten by the mining bug and has since prospected on the Fortymile River and most recently near Fairbanks. As Howard says, "No miner ever gets enough. You could be gettin' gold by the bucketfuls and you want some more" (Fix 2014).

In the 1980s, court battles over mining plans and the National Park Service being required to conduct environmental impact statements to evaluate cumulative effects of mines, led to small-scale miners having to submit more paperwork for NPS approval. In some cases, miners chose to ignore these regulations and operated illegally or their plans did not meet NPS requirements and they were forced to shut down their operations (Bleakley 2002:238; Bleakley 2007:70-71). Since about 1984, Jim Moody submitted annual mining operation plans to the National Park Service for their approval and has mined claims on middle Bonanza Creek and various other claims in the Gold Hill area (Bleakley 2002:239-240; Bleakley 2007:70-72).¹⁸ These modern mining operations, although still small scale, utilized heavy equipment and suction-dredges not available to their predecessors. In the 1990s, Larry James and Mark Fales acquired Moody's Big Eldorado Creek claims and Glenn DeSpain had plans for mining two claims that he tried to patent (Ibid). President Clinton's 1995

Appropriations Act suspended the processing of applications for patented mining claims, but WRST has continued to work with miners on their operating plans to ensure that any activity occurs in accordance with regulations and permits (Bleakley 2002:240; Bleakley 2007:72).¹⁹

After the cessation of mining, Chisana has remained occupied by a few residents. N.P. Nelson was one of the last old-time miners to still reside in Chisana, leaving Alaska in the mid-1950s. Chisana Joe stayed in Chisana until his death in 1952 (Bleakley 2007:68). Billy and Agnes James, Harry Sutherland, and Al Wright were reportedly still there the following year (Ibid). In 1939, the Chisana post office was moved to Nabesna, helping to perpetuate the decline of the community. Ivan Thorall provides a particularly interesting view of this small community:

Chisana was no different than any of the other mining camps that when the gold ran out and there was no profit anymore, everybody just argued with each other. They were all enemies. Billy James was no exception and Agnes [his wife] was even worse. N.P. Nelson was the exception that proved the rule. He kept his nose out of all those arguments. N.P. did not talk bad about others. He would just not discuss it (Thorall 2006:AAF-9403).

Such fighting is not unusual in any small town, whether a former mining camp or not. But pressure increases on individuals and issues between neighbors can become intensified when an economy goes bust, when someone's main identity and livelihood is no longer available, or in such remote places as Chisana where there was little mixing of the population with outsiders, and there were few outlets either for socializing or airing grievances.

By 1947, Chisana became the center for a few sport hunting guides who refurbished the old log buildings, reinvented the place as a quaint frontier town, and maintained an airstrip there. Donald O. Spaulding was the first guide to base his business there beginning in 1947. Lou Anderton and Bud Hickathier flew clients in and out of Chisana for their hunting trips in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s and 1980s, Raymon (Ray) McNutt used pack horses for his guided sport hunting trips from Chisana and Horsfeld, and he and his wife, Gloria, operated a bed-and-breakfast type lodge for their clients.²⁰ Since the mid-1980s, Terry Overly also has lived in Chisana making a living as a sport hunting guide in the business started by his stepfather, Bud Hickathier. He remains one of the few year round residents of Chisana today. The details of these hunting operations are discussed in Chapter 5: In Search of Big Game: Sport Hunting Guides.

Similar to the gold rush days, life in "modern" Chisana was dominated by the routines of day-to-day life: visiting with neighbors, trying to keep busy with projects, picking berries, gardening and hunting, and looking forward to the arrival of the mail. The main differences were fewer people than in the past, the use of airplanes, and the presence of electricity courtesy of personal generators. Gloria McNutt describes what it was like during the three years she lived full-time in Chisana in the 1980s:

It was very cold. You had to dress up to go out to the outhouse. I read a lot of books but we also had a TV with a satellite dish. I also had bought some skis so I did a little bit of that, but not much. We would visit each other. The Overlys lived over two miles down the runway. And there were other people across Chisana Creek, but I just saw them on mail days. They'd come over to get their mail. When the mail plane would come everybody would come out and meet it. It was usually once a week, but in the winter sometimes it wasn't that often. It depended on the weather. Ray did a lot of shoveling of snow, he plowed the airstrip with his D6 Cat, and he used our airplane to fly out to check on the horses. We worked on repairing gear for the guiding business. I had a big sewing machine over in the big house and I patched tents and made feedbags for the horses (McNutt 2015).

While this life was easier than during the gold rush, living in remote Chisana in the 1980s and 1990s was still not easy. It was rustic living. Everything had to be flown in, including food, clothing, lumber, tools, equipment, and fuel. For people like the McNutts, the hardship was worth it, just as it had been to their mining predecessors who stayed in Chisana. As Gloria McNutt said:

When I first went out, it was hard to get used to it. To get accustomed to being out of town. To being away from the telephone and such. Then later on, it was hard to leave it because I really liked it. A lot of things aren't easy, but you put up with it because you like it. I just liked being out there and being out by yourself. The peace and quiet. Now that I look back on it, it was pretty exciting. You never knew what was going to come by or what you would see. I've seen lynx. I've seen coyotes. I've seen all kinds of animals and birds. Or there was the time when a blond grizzly bear who came by during the night found the food cache, which was a building with two deep freezer freezers at the front of it where I would keep food stuff. He pulled one of the freezers off the porch into the yard. He opened it up and he just had a heyday. Then he decided to go into the building itself. I found a trail of groceries from the cabin all the way to the creek, so I knew that's where he went. I went around picking 'em up. Seeing if I could use anything that was left (Ibid).

In the McNutts' later years, they had a telephone at their home in Chisana, but before that the only form of communication was through ground to air radio with passing airplanes or "Caribou Clatters," an on-air radio message service. This type of radio message service acts like an audio bulletin board and is unique to the Alaskan Bush. As Gloria explained:

Caribou Clatter [sic] is a message service out of the Glennallen radio station. It's for people out in the Bush and it comes on, say, two or three times a day. It's always at the same time so you know when it will be on. Everybody out in the Bush turns it on, and there'd be a message, "So and so, be sure and call your mother." So and so, do this and do that (Ibid).

While not as fast as a direct phone call, "Caribou Clatters" did provide a way of communicating immediate information that was definitely an improvement over the old days where you had to wait over a week for mail delivery by dog team or pack horse.

Although the McNutts and a few others have lived in Chisana for a while, the town has never been as large or as vibrant as it was during the gold rush. Since Ray McNutt's death in 2005 and the sale of his guiding operation, some of his Chisana properties have remained with his family. The McNutt children and grandchildren still return to Chisana, but only in the summer and for some fall hunting. They are fixing up some of the buildings and hope to be able to spend more time there after retirement (Ibid).

East of Chisana, the area known as Horsfeld, located on Horsfeld Creek, was another mining related area, although not as large or as prosperous as Chisana. According to NPS records, Horsfeld Creek was probably named to honor a Canadian prospector named Jack Horsfeld (sometimes spelled Hosfeld) who discovered gold in 1903 on a tributary of Beaver Creek just west of the Canadian border (US DOI NPS 2010a:15). Prior to the Chisana Gold Rush, this was the area's first meaningful mineral discovery. A roadhouse was established at the mouth of Horsfeld Creek in late 1913 to provide shelter to travelers along the trail to Chisana, and apparently operated until around 1920 (Ibid). In the late 1930s, occupation of Horsfeld resumed, albeit temporary, when Sam Gamblin mined property near Horsfeld Creek and constructed an airstrip there (Ibid).

Today, Horsfeld is known more for its history as a base of operations for sport hunting guides than for mining. The airstrip there made it attractive to guides like Harry Boyden and Lou Anderton who began using the site in the late 1930s as a base for hunting in the Beaver Creek Valley. "Similar use continued during the 1950s under Ken Folger, during the 1960s under Paul Jovick, and in 1970s and 1980s under Ray McNutt" (Ibid:3). Richard Petersen purchased McNutt's concession in 2002 including structures and continued a guiding and tourist business there. The current Horsfeld concessionaire, Will Koehler, obtained the operation from Petersen in 2013 and provides guiding and recreational services through his business, Wrangell Outfitters.²¹

BREMNER HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Bremner Historic Mining District is another place where gold was found, people came and a small community developed, and then the people left just as quickly. It never became much of a permanent settlement, however activities there left a mark on the history and landscape and justified its designation as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Bremner Historic District is about thirty miles southwest of McCarthy and occupies a mountain pass between the North Fork of the Bremner River and Monahan Creek in the Chugach Mountains. The associated watersheds of Standard Creek and Golconda Creek were also key mining locations. In 1901, prospectors Guy Banta, Pete Monahan, and Angus Gillis located the district's first placer deposits on Golconda Creek (Bleakley n.d.b:8). "From 1902 until 1910 most of the mining occurred just below Standard Creek, about four miles from the head of Golconda" (Ibid). As word got out, prospectors and land speculators staked claims around the district spurring a small gold rush. However, it did not last long, as by mid-1902, word of more promising claims in the Nizina District drew men there to seek higher rewards. Some placer mining did last until 1916 in the southern portion of the Bremner district, and from 1927 to 1942 gold lode deposits in the upper portion of the valley were exploited.²²

Typical of placer mining at the time, most of the work in these early days in the Bremner area was done with hand techniques of pick and shovel and sluice box, and the limited use of water power. "Miners initially employed 'boomer' dams to remove the overburden and shoveled the remaining gravel directly into their sluice boxes" (Ibid). By 1904, "efforts included the direction of pressurized water against bench deposits (hydraulicking), similar to methods employed in Chitina Valley placer claims" (White 2000:5).²³

Paul White, in his history of the Bremner Historic District, mentions there being an insufficient number of sluice boxes at the beginning of the rush, which limited operations, but also that "prospectors lacked even basic tools to handle and remove boulders (such as crowbars, sledgehammers, and blasting powder" (White 2000:46). Having a lack of tools to sustain the influx of men associated with these types of sudden gold rushes is something rarely mentioned. Typically, one might assume that prospectors arriving to stake a claim would be fully outfitted with the necessary tools and equipment. However, in cases where the men were employees of someone else's mine, they would not be expected to have their own tools. It is not clear why there was a lack of tools at Bremner, but the result could have meant increased competition and animosity between miners already in a tight race to stake claims. In a mining camp, where people are living in close quarters and conditions are difficult, emotions could be high, so a disagreement over a sluice box or a shovel could quickly escalate into a full-on brawl. There is no indication that there was more fighting in the Bremner camps than any other mining in the region. In terms of understanding the social dynamics of mining camps, questions like this about how individual miners got along and what conditions provoked animosity or built friendships are worth thinking about. In some cases, men working claims near each other joined forces and became partners who shared their profits, while other miners argued over claims or developed into arch enemies. Knowing the context of their lifestyle and economic situation is key to building a clearer picture of what happened and why.

Despite years of heavy snows and spring floods, many of the signs of previous habitation still remain in the Bremner district. As with many historic mining areas, much can be learned about the life and lifestyle of the people who lived there by the structures, equipment and possessions left behind. The physical remains at Bremner are especially useful for demonstrating the astute adaptive reuse or recycling practices utilized by miners throughout the region that were necessary for survival on their meager income. Whether it was using an old car engine to power a tram (Seltenrich 1990) or lumber from an abandoned and dilapidated structure, this resourcefulness helped make mining a more cost effective endeavor.

The Bremner Gold Mining Company and Yellow Band Gold Mines, for instance reused barrels for siding structures, lining chutes, and creating equipment. Yelinore Inc. reused water pipes in the construction of an aerial tramway to the Sheriff Mine. The reuse of otherwise redundant materials indicates the limited finances available for the purchase and replacement of equipment, and considerable ingenuity at the workplace (White 2000:136).

This practice was not limited to Bremner. Ivan Thorall mentioned that N.P. Nelson and Billy James recycled sluice boxes on their claim at Bonanza Creek in the Chisana District by raiding an old abandoned mine site at Johnson Creek to retrieve the remains of two sluice boxes and fixed them up and packed them back to their claim (Thorall 2006:AAF-9403). Nor was it done only in the Wrangell-St. Elias area. Reclamation of old parts and materials was standard for the time. The men brought this intention and these skills with them, having grown up following similar procedures on farms and in other rural places of the Lower 48.

Our ancestors were more connected with the raw materials they labored so industriously to obtain because they were connected to life in way we are not today. Our forefathers manufactured and repaired many of their daily objects with expertise. We are disconnected from this way of life. We easily purchase what we need, with little thought as to how the elements of our needs come together to make the things we desire. Most of us are children of the service industry. For us the everyday objects of our lives are disposable. People in the beginning of the last century were schooled in the manufacture of the necessities of life as a daily experience (Miller 2011b).

Mining is a dangerous activity with a high likelihood of accidents. For underground mines in particular, working conditions “were poor and the hazards many. Falling rocks, collapsing mine tunnels, and poor air circulation were just a few of the dangers” (Olson and Shaine 2005:64). Disease, lack of food, and being unprepared for the extreme weather conditions also led to miners’ deaths. The Bremner Gold Mining Company “expressed a willingness to begin first aid training in the 1937 season” (White 2000:60). Despite this, one of their miners died from blood poisoning as the result of a cut. There are no statistics available on how many miners died in accidents unrelated to the actual mining activity, such as in fights with angry competitors, but given human nature and the conditions under which the men were living and working, it is likely that such episodes occurred. As in any frontier, mining was plagued by crooks and scoundrels eager to mislead miners to sell their claims, to cheat someone out of their money, or to oversell the possible profits of a claim in order to attract investment partners. Any of this cheating, also could have inspired conflict, revenge and violence among the men involved, no matter on which side of the aisle you stood.

Another point made by White, often not reflected in other accounts of historic mining, was the environmental change the mining brought to the Bremner Valley. The legacy of miners living in the area is not just seen in social, cultural, economic and historical terms, but is also visible in the land

and how they used it. Clearly, removing overburden, moving gravel, blasting rock, drilling holes, and re-routing waterways had effects on the physical landscape in all of the creeks and valleys mined in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, but there were other smaller-scale and less obvious environmental side effects. There was the overhunting of particular species, such as mountain sheep, as prospectors and mining camps ate locally harvested meat. In places where trees were available, they were cut as lumber, for log construction, and for firewood for cooking and heating. In the Bremner District, which is mostly above treeline, willow and alder bushes that produce a quick, hot fire were abundant in the Golconda valley and so were utilized for cooking purposes (White 2000:48). In addition, “in order to improve general living conditions, prospectors burned stands of timber throughout the Bremner Valley to rid the area of insects” (Ibid).

In 1911, the Golconda Mining Company consolidated the claims along Golconda Creek and installed hydraulicking equipment (Ibid:49). However, not much gold was recovered (Bleakley n.d.b:8). Falling gold prices coupled with the onset of World War I, led to a decline in mining, with little activity continuing in the Bremner District after 1916. By the late 1920s, an uptick in gold mining brought men back to the Bremner. In 1934, brothers, Lee and Peyton Ramer, developed a gold lode mine at Golconda Creek.

In 1927 the Ramer brothers located a promising lode above Golconda Creek and began a concentrated effort to develop it. Their Bremner Gold Mining Company equipped the site in 1934 and 1935, constructing a camp and installing two tramways, a hydroelectric plant, and a fifty-ton Marcy mill.

Asa Baldwin began developing the nearby Yellow Band Group in 1936 and acquired the Ramers’ property the following year. He spent the rest of the decade trying to ready his extensive holdings for production (Bleakley n.d.b:8).

Asa Baldwin was born in Austinburg, Ohio, in 1887. In 1903, he earned a bachelor’s degree in civil and mining engineering from Case University, and in 1913, a bachelor’s degree in law from George Washington University. He first arrived in the Wrangell-St. Elias area when he served as a field officer in the United States-Canada International Boundary Survey that went from Point Barrow to Mount St. Elias between 1910 and 1913. Before becoming involved in mining in the Bremner District, Baldwin ran a private engineering practice based in Valdez and Seattle, and served as a surveyor and consultant for the Prince of Wales Mine, Alaska-Juneau Mine, Kennecott Copper Corporation, and the Alaska Railroad (White 2000:87).²⁴

The adoption of air transportation in the 1930s, the clearing of a rough landing field south of Standard Creek, and then construction of a better strip on Golconda Creek a year later brought changes to Bremner. Eventually, the Bremner Gold Mining Company built another small airstrip at the pass, but it also was rough and boggy.²⁵ The Bremner District’s growing reliance on aviation prompted incorporation of Cordova Air Service in 1934. O.A. Torgerson, vice-president of the Bremner Gold Mining Company was one of the founders of the air service, along with pilot and mechanic M.D. “Kirk” Kirkpatrick and G. Earl Means of the Alaska Transfer Company in Cordova. “Many of the directors of Cordova Air Service were heavy investors in the Bremner Mining Company, and they were keen that the mine should be well serviced during the summer months when the cleanup was coming in” (Janson 1981:44). In fact, it was upon trying to leave the Bremner airstrip that Cordova Air Service pilot Merle Smith acquired the nickname “Mudhole” (King 2008:33; Ringsmuth 2012a:15). The district previously had been quite far away from regular transportation routes, such as the railroad to McCarthy. Although during some periods they did have radio contact with settlements in the Chitina Valley. The cost of transportation of goods and supplies as well as for the miners themselves was high. Easier and cheaper transportation by air justified continued prospecting despite limited profits.

Whether ferrying tools and machine parts, performing mercy flights, moving employees to unprospected sites, transporting mining engineers to the district, or dropping light machinery and food items into the camps, airplanes were an integral part of Bremner's mining operation (Ringsmuth 2012a:13).

The mining by the Yellow Band Gold Mines was quite an operation with tramways, an ore bunker, a mill, roads connecting the mill and tram terminals, and a hydroelectric operation to provide the electricity to power the mine, the mill, as well as camp buildings. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, tractors and a dump truck were used to haul supplies, clear snow, construct the airstrip, move camp buildings, and transport ore between bunkers and the mill (White 2000:135). Some of the Yellow Band Group tried to mine year round. It was tough working in the winter in these high mountain elevations living in tent frames with a few other small structures. 1935 was particularly tough when snow slides knocked out high camps and the miners had to take time away from mining to rebuild shelters and other structures (White 2000:60). As was necessary at the time, men who worked as miners also had to be carpenters, mechanics, electricians, and sometimes cooks and launderers, too. For those operations reliant upon the flow of water, winter mining at sub-freezing temperatures was not an option.

When the Kennecott Mine shut down in 1938, the ramifications extended into the Bremner District just as they did for the other nearby mining operations. Chitina Valley residents lost jobs and towns were abandoned, and with the closure of the railroad transportation costs increased.



Portrait of Asa Baldwin, circa 1938. Alaska State Library, Asa C. Baldwin Photograph Collection, ASL-P71-515.

With the US government ordering private gold mines to shut down during World War II, the Yellow Band Mine closed after the 1941 season. Owner Asa Baldwin had intentions of starting up again after the war, however, "the onset of World War Two delayed his efforts and then his premature death ended them altogether. Baldwin's company never resumed operations" (Bleakley n.d.b:8). Asa Baldwin died in September 1942 and there was not enough money available for the board of directors to reopen the Bremner Mines in 1945, when gold mining was allowed to resume. There was some sporadic speculation in the area in the 1950s, with placer mining generally employing two or three miners and using more mechanized equipment, such as backhoes, but by the 1970s the high development costs and low price of gold discouraged any further lode mining in the Bremner.

By this point, there was a large shift in the mining industry to more industrialized practices with the "replacement of the jack-of-all-trades miner with the task-specialized worker" (White 2000:80), and a subsequent demand for higher wages. This worked for large-scale mining companies who could afford to hire large crews, but it hurt the independent small-scale operator who could only afford to

pay a few employees who needed to be multi-skilled and able to do a variety of jobs. In the 1970s, Paul Fretzs, a stockholder in the Yellow Band Gold Mines, reflected on this when he stated:

(In 1934-1939) At one time they hired real miners at \$100 a month and their board, but now you can't get a miner (there is no such thing as a miner anymore) because they have all gone to school and can't work anymore. They don't know a single jack from a double jack. You can't get even a half a miner anymore for \$100 a day and board [parentheses original] (White 2000:80).²⁶

When Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve was established in 1980, "no valid mining claims were extant in the [Bremner] district" (Ibid:81) and NPS regulations prohibited new mining entry. However, given the size of the park and a lack of staff to police it all, some illegal mining did continue while gold prices remained high. According to White, a few miners operated off and on in the Bremner District through the 1980s and 1990s, with the closure of the last illegal placer operation in the 1990s (Ibid). In 2000, the Bremner Historic Mining District was officially recognized and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Bremner Mining District was never inundated with the large number of prospectors or saw extensive associated development as did other mining areas in the Wrangell-St. Elias area. The prospectors put their hearts and souls, and blood, sweat and tears into trying to squeeze gold from the rough gravel of the Chugach Mountains under difficult environmental and economic conditions. Investors consistently provided the necessary financial backing for the larger operation, which in the end proved to be a financial disaster. Unfortunately for them, the region only ever reaped low to moderate profits. The total gross production of the Bremner District did not exceed \$30,000 from placer mining and \$48,000 from lode mining (Ibid:83).

The tenacity of prospectors, nevertheless, left a remarkable legacy. Unlike the common portrayal of the Alaska miner either reaping bonanzas or suffering incredible hardship, the Bremner District helps to indicate that gold mining was also capable of yielding a working wage (Ibid).

NABESNA MINE

The Nabesna Mine is located at the end of the 42-mile Nabesna Road, which runs from Slana on the Tok Cut-Off Highway southeast into Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. Similar to the Kennecott Mine, the Nabesna Mine had a strong influence on development and settlement of the surrounding area, and has a lasting legacy we can still see today.²⁷ The height of gold mining operations at Nabesna was in the 1930s, but the area was first explored for minerals much earlier. In 1899, K.J. Fjeld discovered a quartz-gold lode on Jacksina Creek near the head of the Nabesna River. Given the remote location, it was nearly impossible to develop the site, but Fjeld returned in 1903 and staked lode claims on White Mountain as well as other gold and copper claims. In 1905, Fjeld partnered with Paul Paulson to form the Royal Gold Mining Company (later becoming the Royal Development Company). They developed the property, including erecting an ore mill and driving two tunnels. After not finding much gold, they suspended operations in 1914.

Carl Whitham, who had been exploring the region as a prospector for many years, including staking the second claim on Little Eldorado Creek in May 1913 during the Chisana Gold Rush, was one of the first to investigate the northern slopes of the Wrangell Mountains. In the 1920s, he shifted his attention more seriously to the Nabesna District where in 1922 he discovered an unworked gold vein above the abandoned workings of the Royal Development Company. In 1929, Whitham formed the Nabesna Mining Company to work what he called the "Bear Vein" at the Nabesna Gold Mine.

A YEAR AT THE LODE MINES

Ideally, during any working year, a mining operation explores new veins, extracts and processes known ore, conducts necessary repairs to machinery and equipment, and makes general improvements to the property. A season's work should also generate enough capital to allow work in the following year, keep stockholders content, and make the property attractive to other potential investors. At Bremner, the majority of these tasks depended upon the work accomplished within a period of four to six months. Such a short working season made it especially critical to schedule tasks efficiently.

Yellow Band Gold Mines organized tasks into essentially monthly blocks. Key activities at the mine—mining, milling, freighting, and preparation—were staggered. In April, a small crew, including Baldwin, arrived at the mine to ready the camp for the upcoming season. Preparatory work included freighting supplies from the winter cache near Monahan Creek to the camp by Caterpillar bulldozer, snow removal by Cat and by hand, repairing structures damaged by slides or snow loads, and removing protective cover planks from ore bunkers.



Alaska State Library, Asa C. Baldwin Photograph Collection, ASL-P71-441.

Mining in the Bremner District usually occurred between May and August each year. The photograph shows miner Jack O'Neill and his dog at the Killian Vein (circa 1938), the principal lode deposit worked at the Yellow Band Mine. The mine entrance has since collapsed.

In May, the company hired three or four miners to work the veins. Some tasks at the mine, such as drilling, blacksmithing, and machine repair, demanded high levels of proficiency. For such a small operation, two miners rarely performed the same task simultaneously, although skills did overlap. Unlike large-scale twentieth century mines, where work had become highly task-specialized, small-scale mines employed—and depended upon—a multi-skilled workforce. By employing workers that knew at least two skilled tasks, Yellow Band Gold Mines had the option of stepping up a particular aspect of production, or, if necessary, sustain operations in the case of serious injury, while still keeping the number of miners employed relatively small, and thus relatively inexpensive.

By June, enough ore had been mined from the workings to transfer ore to the mill. Snowmelt from warmer temperatures improved overall water supply and by May-June, the volume was sufficient to generate electricity at the powerhouse. The company often brought in a millwright to conduct the first runs of the mill and make minor adjustments.

Mining on the veins ended in mid-August. Over the next few weeks the crew finished milling, prepared the camps for winter, and undertook repair/construction duties.

Miners, including Baldwin, worked nearly every day and sometimes through the night in order to accomplish tasks. Many held shares in the company, and thus had a vested interest in working overtime. The Fourth of July was taken as a rest day for all crew.

During the closed season, the company employed a few workers to freight supplies from the town of McCarthy to a point south of the Chitina River. These workers also cut lumber from company-owned timberlands near the mouth of Monahan Creek, ten miles north of the main camp. Baldwin spent the winter bookkeeping, interesting other stockholders, and employed in other jobs.

Even the best scheduling could go wrong. In 1941, for instance, the mining crew did not arrive in May, as anticipated, because of technical problems with the plane service. The delay threatened to reduce the amount of work that could be accomplished at the mine for the year, but it also had more serious consequences for those already in the Bremner District. The following excerpts are selected from Asa Baldwin's 1941 diary.

Figure 1. Description of Working in the Bremner Mining District (White 2000:157).

Friday 2 May

Joe and Bill replanking Sheriff lower bunkers
Adrian & John shoveling snow from running cable
between No.s 1 & 2 Towers—from 10 to 15 feet in
snow.

Cook gets some rooster ptarmigan on Monahan Cr.
I shovel through 8 feet of snow just above the Gol-
conda Creek bridge and get WATER.
No plane and no radio.

Monday 5

Joe hurt back while working on Sh. lower bunker day
before yesterday—log feel [sic] on him. Did not work
today.

Bruno, Adrian & Joe[sic, probably John] set dead man
and shieve on big rock above flume and got 1/4" run-
ning cable around it—preparatory to hauling up logs
for storage dam.

In pm, they shoveled snow off the saw mill.
No plane today.

Sunday 18

John laid off today. Said he could not throw 15 feet
without something to eat.

Joe, Bruno, Adrian and I continue work at Storage
Dam. Now have all but about 10 feet of bedrock cut
exposed. No plane yet.

Wednesday 21

Men worked half day at Storage Dam a/c nothing they
could take for lunch.

No plane today. The cook and I go down to Monahan
Cr. after dinner and get 8 ptarmigan.

Thursday 22

Men again work half day at dam site. Cook in bed
with bad tooth and earache. About 1:30 pm the plane
from Copper Center came and "bombed" 13 packages
including 2 drums of gas. Everything recovered and in
good shape except 1 drum of gas which split in two
places letting out about 1/2 the gas.

Friday 30

Men take one sled load up hill with Cat, then get BB
hoist going and begin to pull logs toward dam.
Cook gave notice he was quitting when plane comes.
Go down to field this morning and evening and do
some ditching. Field now practically dry.

Sunday 1 June

Men working at hauling material to storage dam.
Lyle finally came with plane at 10:15 am. Made three
trips from Chitina bringing gas, grub and 4 miners [or
men]—Klas, Otto, Nelson, Ernie and Mrs. Smith.
Smith changed his mind and is going to stay after all.

Alaska State Library, Asa C. Baldwin Photograph Collection, ASL-P71-495.



Aerial transportation could be a mixed blessing to an isolated mining operation. Planes transported equipment, supplies, and people with greater ease than land freighting. Their widespread adoption, however, also fostered a greater dependence on plane services, any disruption of which could have severe repercussions to mining operations. This photo was taken of the first plane to land on the Yellow Band Gold Mines airstrip, completed in 1939 by the Alaska Road Commission.

Figure 2. Excerpt of a Journal Highlighting Day-to-Day Life at a Mine in the Bremner Mining District (White 2000:158).

The opening of the Nabesna prospect coincided with improved national economic conditions for gold mining following the 1929 stock market crash. Although the increased conservatism of investors hindered the start-up of mining operations, reductions in equipment and supply costs reduced operating overheads significantly. The growing use of aerial transportation to move equipment, supplies, and workers cheaply to mine sites also advantaged operations in Alaska, where many mines did not enjoy all-season access roads. Significant support also came from government efforts to revitalize the national economy (White 2000:27).

In 1933, a patent for the Nabesna Mine was issued to the Nabesna Mining Company (Carl Whitham) and patented claims encompassed the town and much of White Mountain, thereby making it privately owned land. Mine shafts were drilled, a cyanide treatment system was installed, and then they mined and milled the low-grade ore.

The company [Nabesna Mining Company] expended hundreds of thousands of dollars on the claims and during the Great Depression hundreds of people earned livings because of the mine and considered that mine a godsend. The right of the mine's owner to be there and to offer those jobs was insured by the mine's fee ownership, the patent rights, of the claims (Stanley 2002:104).

In conjunction with development of the mine, Whitham brushed out an airfield along the Nabesna River. At the time, air transportation was on the rise around Alaska, and without a road, it was the most economical way to access the mine's remote location both for bringing in supplies as well as shipping out ore. Bob Reeve was one of the pilots who flew in fresh food, mail, and tobacco for the miners. The other benefit of having an airfield was for medical evacuation. Carl Whitham was himself the beneficiary of such an emergency rescue. He had fallen down a mine shaft and was severely injured. Cordova-based pilot Bob Gillam flew through a snowstorm, arrived in Nabesna after dark, and flew Whitham 250 miles to the closest hospital in Fairbanks where they were able to save his life (Day 1957:119-120; Ringsmuth 2012a:35-36).

Another major transportation improvement that affected the Nabesna Mine was construction of the Nabesna Road in 1933 by the Alaska Road Commission and the Nabesna Mining Corporation. This enabled the company to haul ore out by truck from the mine to the Tok Cut-Off highway, rather than flying it to Valdez for shipment to the Lower 48 as pilot Bob Reeve had been doing under contract for Whitham. By reducing transportation costs, the potential for the mine to make a profit increased. Savings were so great that by 1936 they could ship in first rate lumber from Seattle rather than cutting and hauling local logs (White 2000:28). Instead of relying on dog teams, pack horses, or Caterpillar tractors to access the mine and haul in supplies, having a road meant trucks and automobiles could be used. This also opened the area up to increased visitation and tourism. While the number of visitors was low in the early days, more people came as wild Alaska adventure seeking was on the rise in the 1960s and 1970s, and word got out about the road. With establishment of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, the Nabesna Road, like the McCarthy Road, has become a popular access point for entry into the park's backcountry.

During World War II, the Nabesna Mine's airfield played a major role in development of the Northway Airfield, which was a critical refueling stop for military planes flying between the Lower 48, Canada and Alaska. In 1941, when the Northway field was being constructed, there was as yet no road to Northway, so men, supplies, and equipment were airlifted in from Nabesna. The rough airstrip was improved and the 6,000 foot long main runway became one of the biggest in Alaska. Aviation gas, equipment, and supplies for Northway were trucked into Nabesna from Valdez via the Richardson

Highway, Tok Cut-Off and Nabesna Road, staged in Nabesna, and then flown over the Nutzotin Mountains to the site of the new Northway Airfield.²⁸ After the war, the Nabesna Field became known as Reeve Field, named after pilot Bob Reeve, who was the main pilot who pioneered and flew the Nabesna-Northway route. After closure of the Nabesna Mine in the late 1940s and abandonment of the town, the airfield fell into disrepair. Grass and willows quickly took over, and erosion and flooding from the ever-changing channels of the glacier-fed Nabesna River have eaten away at the bank and consumed the old airfield (Justin 2014b).

As with many mining operations, a small town developed around the Nabesna Mine to provide housing and serve the needs of the mine employees. Nabesna became a small community of miners with a laundry facility, bakery, post office, medical dispensary, and the “Do Drop Inn” saloon, which has been reported to have had “a lady proprietor, who in turn employed several other ladies” (Stanley 2002:110). By 1932, the tent camp was converted to log and frame buildings with the logs being harvested locally and made into lumber at the mine’s on-site sawmill (Ibid:101). There were houses for the mine owner, superintendent and bosses, a bunkhouse for the single men, cabins for married workers, guesthouses for visitors, and a mess hall. The mine had a power plant that supplied electricity and its large boiler provided steam heat to the mill building and most of the surrounding structures.²⁹ In 1932, the telegraph arrived in town, with the wire coming from Slana. Phil Holdsworth was the mine’s manager in 1936 and later became Alaska’s first Commissioner of Natural Resources after statehood. Carl Whitham served as postmaster from 1940 to 1942.

There were women in town, some being wives of the bosses or cooks, but there were others pursuing their own occupations. When they finally had time off and ventured out of the mines, some single miners enjoyed spending their hard-earned cash on whiskey and women. Prostitution and alcohol sales were lucrative businesses for intrepid entrepreneurs in these small mining encampments.

Wherever miners are, so are women and Nabesna was no exception. Whitham didn’t judge this arrangement and had no complaint about it so long as activities did not interfere with work. The ladies were young, good looking, ambitious and never hesitated to do other work, and be paid (Ibid:111).

Nabesna’s redlight entertainment was available a couple of miles down the Nabesna Road; no women were permitted at the mine. According to a 1993 cultural resources study of the Nabesna Road, “Five buildings, serving as a whorehouse for the miners, were located here. In addition, Diva Dale ran a trading post here” (McMahan 1994:23). Another one of the structures belonged to Malamute Mae and Ruth Williams, who were sisters (Spude et al. 1984:218). And similar to miners, often these women worked for a time and then, after making enough money to suit their needs, traveled on.

The community of Nabesna was similar in make-up and lifestyle as other mining towns in the Wrangell-St. Elias area. It was like Kennecott in the sense that they both had large work crews employed by a company, not individual miners working their own claims on remote creeks like occurred in Chisana or the Nizina District. They both had land-based access, either a railroad or a road, and functioned during close to the same time period. However, the mine and town of Nabesna was smaller than Kennecott and neighboring McCarthy, so it did not have as many amenities, outlets for socializing, or entertainment. Kennecott had a school for the employees’ children to attend, but there were not enough families with children in these smaller communities to justify establishment of a school and hiring of a teacher. It is possible that children were homeschooled by their mothers.

Nabesna was a company town, similar to Kennecott, with many of the men working for the mine comprising a closely-knit community of mine employees, bosses, and local business owners. This compared to places like Bremner, where most of the residents worked for the mine, but there

was little in terms of a surrounding community; it was just the mine, bunkhouses, and the mill. The divisions of social and economic class common in the rest of the country at the time were duplicated in these small mining camp communities. Mine superintendents and managers and their families mostly socialized among themselves and did not interact with the regular mine workers, most of whom were single young men. Upper-level managers had their own homes and hosted gatherings for each other, whereas the men who worked in the tunnels or operated the trams lived together in shared bunkhouses and worked long hours leaving little time for tea parties or holiday celebrations. After the evening meal at the end of a long day, a miner was more likely to play a hand of poker with his crew buddies, read, or write a letter home before heading to bed. On the rare day off, it was time to take a bath, do laundry, mend clothing, or hit the saloon for some good storytelling, drinking, and dancing. At the Nabesna Mine, where some men did spend the winter, there was at least one incident where a miner went skiing and enjoyed the nearby mountainous terrain (Stanley 2002:113-114).

The lifestyle of the men living in summer mining camps, like at Nabesna, differed from that of other residents of the region. At the mines, they had better access to regular shipments of food and supplies through established transportation corridors that were easily accessed in the summer. It was even better for those living in or near a town because there was a general store stocked with canned and dry goods, bakery items, and periodic fresh food. The miners who worked for the larger mines had cash they could use to pay for their purchases. Some of the independent miners paid their debts in gold nuggets or had to buy on credit until they earned money on the creeks, but it was a far more reliable system than the fur trade-based economy. The Ahtna and Upper Tanana people and non-Native and Native trappers lived in seasonal camps and were highly dependent on traders for access to western goods. They either had to travel long distances to the few permanent trading posts in the area, such as at Slana, Tanacross or Chisana, or wait for traders like Ted Lowell or Milo Hajdukovich to come to them by dog team in the winter or by boat in the summer.

Alaska Native residents in the Wrangell-St. Elias area were impacted by the influx of mining activity onto their homelands, as previously mentioned for Chisana. A number of mining claims in the region were founded based on information or advice provided by local Ahtna. Many of these Ahtna leaders or guides never received recognition or reward for their contributions. In the Nabesna region, after gaining advice from Gakona Charley, prospector George Hazelet is credited with the first placer gold discovery on the headwaters of the Chistochina River in May 1899 (Tower 1991:2; Bleakley 2006:51). As the years went by and as prospecting increased in the area, the people of Nabesna, Batzulnetas, Chistochina, and Mentasta felt the impact:

There were a few productive mines in Chisana (1913), Nabesna (1923), and Slate Creek (1899), which left mining settlements on the Upper Ahtna landscape. Between the three, mining activities continued in the area well into the 1970s.

The mines brought the Upper Ahtna experience in prospecting, surveying, ferrying, transport, and stills. Katie's [John] brother, Houston Sanford, married into Chisana village and had an interest in his father-in-law's mine there. Later, Katie's nephew, Johnny Nicolai acted as guide for archeological and road surveying teams in the Copper Basin and the McKinley park area. Katie's brother-in-law, Jack John Justin, freighted supplies from Valdez to Chisana by horse drawn sled. He later talked to school children about the dangers of alcohol and the many stills left in the Nabesna valley by thirsty miners. Into the late 1950s women and children sometimes had to take to the brush and keep hungry vigil when tipsy men of all races roared through Native encampments (Ainsworth, John and John 2002:29).

By specifically describing what happened in Mentasta, Ainsworth and the Johns show that the Ahtna had both positive and negative experiences with mining:

Early 20th century miners had an unexpected impact on Mentasta. They caused the establishment of trade-good centers in the territory that pre-empted the arduous trade missions to Knik. Local trading posts also made tents, traps, snares, shells, and staple food stuffs a standard in the lives of those born after 1900. ...The local mines introduced wage labor to the villages in the upper basin. When Fred John was a child he followed the prospectors and learned many useful skills, which he used to support his family and thrive in the world that was quickly changing around him. Later he sold meat to the miners at Nabesna and worked at Chisana and Slate Creek (Ibid:30).

Despite obvious negatives of the introduction of disease and alcohol and the devaluation of Native practices and lifestyles, some Ahtna and Upper Tanana did benefit from the mining economy, whether it was with direct employment or from market hunting, or selling wood and warm traditional fur clothing and footwear (Simeone 2014). As Lavell Wilson, who grew up in Northway in the 1940s said, “The old Nabesna Mine. Some of the Natives from Northway worked there, you know, in the early days before the road. Oscar [Albert] worked there, and that was a big mine back then in them days” (Wilson 2008).

The legacy of non-Native mining also provided the Ahtna an opportunity to re-occupy abandoned lands. A fire at Cooper Creek Village (Tthiixaa’ Gheeg) around 1943 or 1944 prompted the Ahtna residents to move (Kari 1986:209). They settled next to Reeve Field at Nabesna, which had been cleared and used by the military as a staging area for building the airfield in Northway (Simeone 2014). The former mining claims and airstrip at Nabesna were no longer occupied by the non-Native population, thereby making it easier for the Cooper Creek villagers to move in after their village burned and make it feel like home. Ahtna families built log cabins and enjoyed a peaceful subsistence lifestyle. By 1952, the last families moved from Nabesna, finding new homes in villages along the road system that had schools, like Chistochina or Mentasta. Wilson Justin has fond memories of his childhood in Nabesna, including his last summer there when he was six years old:

We were the last two out of Nabesna. My Aunt Lena, me, and her four pack dogs. ...Somewhere down the trail we found a second home, or I guess I should say, another place to camp. But it wasn’t the same and I wanted to go back. ...I went back over and over for any number of reasons, but I never saw Nabesna again, in that light, of that summer under a glacier that promised to be with us forever (Justin 2014b:28).

Douglas “Sy” Neeley came to the Copper Valley in 1942 when he was about nine years old when his father came to Chistochina to work for the Alaska Road Commission. Sy’s father was friends with Carl Whitham, owner of the Nabesna Mine, so when Carl’s nephew came up for a visit, Sy was invited to spend the summer at the Nabesna Mine. For two ten-year-old boys, having a mine as their playground was pure bliss. They played in the old mill building, even though they were not allowed in. They were fascinated with all the big machinery in the power plant – “Every kid likes big machinery” (Neeley 1993). They watched the assayer use porcelain cups and chemicals to test the ore. “Of course, soon as he’d leave, why we’d have to stick our nose in there. Stunk pretty bad in there, but there was a lot of interesting things in there you could look at” (Ibid). Even though Sy was a boy when he was around the Nabesna Mine, he remembers that:

The mill and the mine was the most modern at that time. Everything was electric. The electricity ran through all the buildings around there. They had steam heat in all of the buildings. The mill building, the ball mill and the jaw crusher and some of that was run by flat belts, but all the newer stuff that Phil Holdsworth put in, all the cyanidation treatment and all the shaker tables and everything, was all electric. It had all electric lights throughout the whole thing. Even the mine shafts were all electric and ventilated up there.

The Nabesna Mine ran year round. Since that mill and mine ran year round, why it was a constant source of income there. They had as high as 60 people there working in the mine. 40 to 60 people depending on the season. In the summertime, they might have the sawmill going and they'd have some extra people to run the sawmill. You know, the wood lots were going then. They were hauling wood in from the woods. Carl Whitham that owned the mine always had the Natives cut his wood for the mine. That was all cut down around Jack Creek and along in through there. Lost Creek and Trail Creek. In the summertime, they hauled it in with a couple of old Ford BB trucks (Ibid).

Of course, the Nabesna Mine did not exist in isolation. As early as 1914, DeWitt's trading post and roadhouse in Slana connected people along the trails and in the villages in the area. But once the road was built from Nabesna out to Slana, access to and from the mine became much easier. This road was a lifeline. The small communities along the road system of the Copper Valley may have been separated by many miles, but they were interconnected as one big social and economic system, first by a network of trails and then via the roads. As Sy Neeley explains:

Chistochina was the first place from Nabesna where you could come down to get groceries or things like that. There was a little store at Nabesna there. Skookum Creek Trading Company. It was right on Skookum Creek there, but it was a very small place. Of course, Chistochina was a small place, too. The big place to go in those days, the biggest place on the road here, was the old Gulkana Lodge. It was a three-story lodge building with a grocery store. And then the next place was Copper Center, of course. But in the wintertime, why the roads all closed. Basically, everybody just snuggled in. And the mail came through once a month however best possible way. And if it didn't get through once a month, why, you know, it would get through as soon as the roads got good enough so somebody could get up and down it (Ibid).

The roads built in the 1940s helped make it easier for people to remain in the region as permanent residents. They had better access to goods and services in neighboring communities. Better roads meant they could travel around the valley for employment opportunities but still return home every night. This was a period of increased mobility, with residents shifting residency from town to town depending on the available jobs.

Most miners who worked at the Nabesna Mine did not stay around after the mine closed. One exception was Bill Cameron, who had been timekeeper at the Nabesna Mine in the 1930s as well as the postmaster in Nabesna from 1933 to 1940. He left the mine and went to work for the Alaska Road Commission. He worked his way up to become foreman for the Glennallen Camp, and then District Superintendent for the Glennallen district for the Alaska Highway Department. After statehood, he went to work for the federal government and was the liaison between the Federal Public Roads Administration and the Alaska Department of Highways. Cameron was able to apply his knowledge and skills in different ways to take on new jobs so that he could remain in the Copper River valley. This ingenuity and determination is what was required in order to make a living in a place with few jobs

and a small number of people spread out across a wide swath of wild country. As Sy Neeley explains, things were done differently in the early days:

I think a lot of people in those days, you know, came up with ideas and a lot of those ideas turned out to be major engineering ideas. Bill [Cameron] was not schooled as an engineer, but you know a lot of the ideas that he came up with have turned out to be what they call major engineering ideas that actually worked. A lot of it was a case of necessity. We've got a problem, we got to cure it, and what's the best cure for it. It was the kind of the mother of necessity type thing. You know, give me two axes and some shovels and a bunch of guys and we'll go build a bridge. And they did. A lot of these guys that were around the country in those days were Swedes and Norwegians from the old country that were craftsmen. You know, give them a log or two logs and tell them to put these together and build something out of it, why they'd build you something that would stand for a hundred years if you kept it dry. If they had a piece of machinery to help them, why that was fine. If they didn't, why they could muscle it out and get it done. Like a lot of these old bridges, if you got underneath them and looked at them, they're all made out of just spruce logs that came from close by and were all hand cut and fit in (Ibid).

As with the other gold mines in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, the Nabesna Mine shut down in 1942 during World War II. The mine resumed operations in 1945, but it never produced again at a high rate. Market conditions at the time caused a decline in mining throughout Alaska.



Sitting on the hitching post in front of the Gulkana Roadhouse, circa 1910. Harry and Norma Hoyt family papers, Archives and Special Collections, Consortium Library, University of Alaska Anchorage.

Without government subsidies, the Alaska gold industry struggled to compete with the increase of mining operations worldwide that effectively lowered the price of gold. The high cost of gold mining in Alaska, especially in the high mountain regions, proved far too prohibitive (Ringsmuth 2012a:20).

Due to economic factors and the death of Carl Whitham in 1947, the Nabesna Mine was forced to shut down. There was nobody left to run it. The mine and accompanying buildings remained a ghost town, except for a few residents in the 1940s and 1950s, including the mine caretakers.³⁰

When Bud and LeNora Conkle arrived in Nabesna in the fall of 1948, well-known Wrangell Mountains guide, dog musher, freighter, mailman and prospector, Harry Boyden, was living there. He wintered his horses on the Nabesna Bar, so was living in a cabin nearby and served as caretaker of the closed mine. Prior to Boyden, Fred Bronniche had been a watchman at the mine in the 1940s (Ringsmuth 2012a:75). Before the Conkles eventually settled at Tanada Lake, they spent a winter living in Bill Cameron's old cabin at Nabesna. Harry Boyden was their neighbor and they developed a close friendship with him.³¹ LeNora portrays the seasoned Boyden as a helpful and friendly neighbor to the newly arrived Conkles. In Alaska, a newcomer or greenhorn like this is referred to as a cheechako.

He had a bucket of water in one hand and an armload of wood in the other—his way of welcoming us to our new home. Harry had gracious manners, and seemed pleased that we had arrived. For many winters previous he had been the sole resident of Nabesna. In his sixties, he had retired from packing and guiding, and was the caretaker for the long-closed Nabesna gold mine (Conkle and Rearden 1991:75).

Harry Boyden and the Conkles spent many hours together playing pinochle, listening to sporting events on the radio or "Tundra Topics" messages aired for reaching those without two-way communication, or being entertained by Harry's many stories about big game guiding and adventures from his many years in the area. But Harry also remained typical of pioneers of the time. He hunted for meat from the land. He traveled by dog team. He knew the proper type of firewood to burn to stay the warmest on cold winter nights. And he was thrifty and resourceful. One Christmas when this thriftiness caused quite a delay demonstrates behavior that perhaps was not so unusual among other residents and the earlier miners at Nabesna:

Finally at one o'clock we could stand it no longer and walked to Harry's to see what was delaying him. He was washing clothes! He had decided to take a bath and put on clean clothes for the holiday. After carrying and heating bath water he didn't want to waste it, so he washed his clothes in it. Then, by golly, he still didn't want to throw all the nice warm water out, so he scrubbed his floor with it (Ibid:89).

In contrast, Harry Boyden's love of reading and his extensive library may have set him apart from his rough and tumble peer group (Ibid:82).

While LeNora Conkle's account of their time in Nabesna is specific to a time when the mine closed and there were few people still living there, it is representative of what life was probably like in small mining towns of an earlier era. Neighbors helped neighbors. They traveled by dog team together. They spent much time at each other's cabins. There was a lot of card playing, storytelling, and singing. And they shared food and celebrated holidays together.

In the late 1960s, entrepreneur and mining engineer Kirk Stanley bought the patented Nabesna Mine in hopes of retrieving new gold from the already worked claims or finding new veins. His operation never really got off the ground, but he saw the historical and tourism value of the site

and worked to preserve and protect it. He nominated it to the National Register of Historic Places, where it received official listing in 1979. In 1985, despite the mine being within the national park and regulations being in place to control mining within park boundaries, Wayne Bolt conducted drilling operations at the Nabesna Mine. “The NPS initially pursued litigation to stop Bolt, but ultimately developed a regulatory solution” (Bleakley 2002:145). New regulations that applied to all Wrangell-St. Elias National Park lands required an approved plan of operations for a mine had to exist before an access permit would be issued (Ibid).

In the end, the Nabesna Gold Mine was a profitable small-scale mining operation. It “turned more than \$1,800,000 in gross profits within 10 years” (White 2000:28). Now Nabesna is home to an abandoned mine, dilapidated old cabins and out buildings, and a few residents who moved in after the mine shut down, including Kirk and Cole Ellis, whose parents, Bill and Lorene Ellis, bought property from Harry Boyden around 1957 built a home, and established a guiding business. Kirk and Cole took over the family business and as pilots and registered guides operate Devil’s Mountain Lodge and Devil’s Mountain Guide Service, and Ellis Big Game Guides and Outfitters.

WHITE RIVER

Historically, there were no non-Native settlements in the White River area (Stirling 1985:2), although nearby Ahtna, Upper Tanana, and Tutchone utilized the area seasonally for subsistence activities, North Fork Island was the site of a small village and an important trading location, and Kletsan Creek, a tributary to the White River, was known by the Upper Tanana as a source of copper nuggets (McKenna 1959:65; Reckord 1983b:239; Pratt 1998; Cooper 2006; Simeone 2014:68-69). In 1898, Henry Bratnobar was the first prospector to find minerals in the White River when he discovered large quantities of float copper, but he was never able to develop it due to the difficulty of getting supplies to the remote location.

In the early 1900s, some copper mining claims were filed in the White River area and it was explored further during the 1913 Chisana Gold Rush, but no large-scale mining ever occurred. A slab of native copper weighing about 6,000 pounds was found near Canyon City, Yukon (Cairnes 1915). “Possibly the largest settlement near the river was the mining camp of the American Smelting & Refining Company of Denver, Colorado, which established a number of buildings on North Fork Island, possibly in the 1910s” (Stirling 1985:2).

The White River was a popular transportation route to the Chisana District, especially in the winter after freeze-up when hauling of freight by dog team over the ice was easier than navigating the river water by boat (Ibid:5-13). By 1915, the community of Canyon City was established on the White River near the Canada/Alaskan border and was a jumping off point for access into the Upper White River District, Yukon and or over to Chisana (Cairnes 1915). “Previous to October 1, 1913, there were not a dozen men in Upper White River district and very few along the White River or Kluane routes; and the only buildings in Upper White River district were some half dozen cabins in Canyon City and two very small cabins on Beaver creek” (Ibid:24). During the Chisana Gold Rush, the Alaska Road Commission built a shelter cabin at Solo Mountain that was rehabilitated by the National Park Service in 1996 (Bleakley 2002:211). Several years after the Chisana rush, a small placer-gold stampede on Beaver Creek brought numerous prospectors into the upper White River area, but no paying quantities were ever found.

While there was periodic prospecting and mining in the White River area, nobody stayed long or made this their permanent home as compared to other parts of the Wrangell-St. Elias area, such as Kennecott, McCarthy, or Chisana. The miners soon moved on to other more productive opportunities. Big game hunting guide, Doug Vaden, is a more recent exception, having lived there year round for nearly thirty years from the 1950s to the 1980s, however he did not do any mining (Ibid:19-20).



Prospectors and trail blazers moving provisions over Rohn Glacier to the Shushana and White River country, circa 1913. Photo by J.P. Hubrick. Courtesy of Eleanor Tjosevig and Dick Anderson.

MINING IN THE PARK

The presence of mining played a major role in the battle over establishment of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve: whether mining should be allowed to continue within the park, where park boundaries should be drawn to allow for mining claims, and how mining operations should be managed. According to Ben Shaine, who actively fought for the new park, mining was one of the key issues negotiated between park planners, environmental activists, local residents, and miners (Shaine 2016).

The 1976 Mining in the Parks Act (MPA) recognized potential negative impacts mining could have on the values for which national parks were established, so it stipulated how mining in parks was managed. When Wrangell-St. Elias National Park was established in 1980, it contained roughly 11,400 acres that were originally patented under the terms of the Mining Law of 1872 for the purpose of mineral development. A patented mining claim is one where the miner owns the land he is mining (ownership of surface and subsurface rights) and just like any other private property he has the right to sell it. An unpatented claim means someone can mine there but they do not own the land (ownership of mineral rights only). Miners have to complete several steps to demonstrate validity of their claim, including locating it, marking the boundaries, conducting preliminary work, and recording it (Bleakley 2002:148-149).

Park designation closed entry to new mining claims within WRST park boundaries, but mining was allowed to continue on existing claims (US DOI NPS n.d.d), and the NPS had to allow “reasonable and feasible access to miners possessing valid existing rights” (Bleakley 2002:144).³² The decision to close the park to new mining entry and implementation of more stringent standards and a new process angered local miners. For example, in 1979, University of Alaska professor Leo Mark Anthony believed that mining in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park was really a myth, because “no one can meet the requirements” (Anthony 1979:18). Many of these small-scale miners had a long history of mining in the region and they believed there were still large undiscovered mineral deposits that promised great fortunes. After a 1985

court decision, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park was required to consider the effects of past mining before it evaluated proposals for new mining, and existing miners with valid claims within park boundaries had to suspend operations until the NPS completed their evaluations.³³ This only added to the animosity within the Wrangell-St. Elias area mining community towards the park service.

In the 1980s and 1990s, when the NPS was trying to figure out the best way to manage and regulate mining in WRST, there was much uncertainty and the miners struggled with an ever-changing series of rules and procedures they were told they had to follow. This created a great deal of confusion for both miners and managers (Bleakley 2002:144-147). Eventually, rules were established so that now before any mining can commence, a miner must submit and obtain approval of a Mining Plan of Operations (MPO), and to gain access across federal land, a private landowner must obtain an ANILCA 1110(b) Right-of-Way Certificate of Access (RWCA).³⁴ Now that the situation has stabilized, the process seems less complicated and miners know that they have to submit their operating plans in advance or that they need to gain special permission if they wish to cross federal lands for doing something like walking a Cat into their non-road accessible site. However, this process has made it more costly to undertake mining, which could be a contributing factor to claims failing.

As with hunting, management of mining is shared between the federal and state governments. Differences in attitudes and application of permits and regulations over time have led to conflicts. For example, while the NPS may allow mining within a certain area, if someone does not mine their claim they are violating state requirements for maintaining an active claim and it is considered abandoned unless they file the right paperwork in advance.

From the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, a number of small-scale mining operations were still active within park boundaries. These included Russ Hoffman at Rex Creek, Jim Moody on Bonanza Creek, and Mark Fales and Larry James on Big Eldorado Creek. Eventually, many of these existing miners stopped their activities. It is unknown whether this was because of the permitting, a lack of ore, or for other reasons. A number of miners donated patented and unpatented claims they were no longer using to the NPS and in some cases the NPS acquired properties from former mining operators (Bleakley 2002:81).

Currently, there are a few mining claims still active in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, including three active unpatented claims in the Gold Hill area and Randy Elliot who actively mines at Dan Creek. The mining that remains is small-scale and most miners experience little viable economic output compared to the amount of time, money and effort put in. For most of them, it is something they do for a short period each summer but is not their sole source of identity or income. The exception is Randy Elliot, who uses heavy equipment to move large amounts of dirt and overburden in search of gold. He identifies as a full-time miner, not just a hobbyist, and mining provides his primary source of income.³⁵

While the culture and traditions of small-scale miners has faded within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve as no new mining claims can be filed, it is still possible for someone to follow some of these traditions and live out a frontier dream by panning for gold. NPS regulations allow the surface collection of rocks and minerals by hand (including hand-held gold pans) for personal recreational use (36 CFR 13.35). Disturbing the ground surface or using shovels, pickaxes, sluice boxes or suction dredges is not allowed.³⁶ However, the chances are slim of acquiring marketable quantities of gold in this manner and making a living from it as earlier miners did.

CONCLUSION

One thing that becomes apparent in the story of mining in the Wrangell-St. Elias area is the fluidity of the residencies of many of the miners during the heyday of mining in the Copper Basin. The same names appear again and again, but associated with different locations. For instance, Asa Baldwin, who is primarily associated with mining at Bremner in the late 1930s and early 1940s,

previously worked as a contract surveyor for other mining companies, including the Kennecott Copper Corporation, Nabesna Mining Corporation and others in the Nizina Mining District (White 2000:4). Or Martin Harrais and Martin Radovan both first worked at Kennecott Mine before venturing out on their own. Andy Taylor was associated with mining at Chisana before he became a freighter and later hunting and wilderness guide. Harry Boyden freighted mail and supplies between Chisana and Nabesna, eventually settling in Nabesna and in his later years becoming caretaker of the mine there.

For most independent miners, mining alone did not provide enough income to make a living. They worked at whatever they could find to make ends meet and combined various jobs or did different things at different times in order to have enough money, whether this was mining, trapping, guiding, freighting, running a trading post, being employed by a larger mining company, having a job as US Commissioner or postmaster, being a pilot, or working construction to build the railroad, roads, and bridges. Like those in other occupational groups, some miners followed these different paths either on an annual basis or at different points in their lives and permanently settled in the area. As a group, however prospectors and miners tended to be more transient. When a claim failed to produce or had been mined out, a partnership collapsed, or the operation ran out of money, miners were eager to move on and risk it all again in hopes of hitting that next big jackpot, whether this was to the Klondike, Fairbanks, Nome, Iditarod, or California.

Mining has a strong foothold in the history of the Wrangell-St. Elias region, a legacy which continues today in the country's largest national park. Mining changed both the physical and cultural landscape of the area. Large amounts of rocks and dirt were moved around and trees cut down for lumber and firewood, which forever altered the lay of the land. Employment at the mines created the region's first real opportunities for steady wage labor. "Mining permanently altered the area's demography as well. Expanding opportunities soon attracted additional people. Copper Center, Chitina, McCarthy, Kennecott, Nabesna, and Chisana were all established by or for miners" (Bleakley n.d.b:13). This population influx also brought in diversity, as many of the miners, businessmen, railroad or road construction workers were from Norway, Sweden, Finland, Latvia, Russia, Germany, Yugoslavia, and Croatia. For those who stayed and made the region a permanent home, this mix of cultures, need to rely on your own wits to survive, as well as the variety of ways of making a living made the wilds of Alaska that much more interesting and enticing as a place to stay. For those who could make a go of it and who fell in love with the beauty of the region, it proved to be more than just a place to extract minerals from the ground. It became home.

Endnotes

¹ For more about the legal case of Northern Alaska Environmental Center versus Hodel and the court requirement that Environmental Impact Statements be done, see Bleakley 2002:144-148.

² For more about the history of the May Creek Airstrip, see Bleakley 2002:110-112.

³ "The park first leased Al Gagnon's May Creek homestead in 1983, converting it to a ranger station and bunkhouse. Following the owner's threats to subdivide the surrounding property, Superintendent Martin suggested that the NPS acquire it, and that deal was finalized in 1985" (Bleakley 2002:201).

⁴ For more about Margaret and Martin Harrais, see Harrais n.d.; Munsey 1975; Hunt 1996:186-192; and the chapter on Margaret Keenan Harrais in *A Place of Belonging: Founding Women of Fairbanks, Alaska* by Phyllis DeMuth Movius (Fairbanks, AK: University of Alaska Press, 2009), pp 79-101.

⁵ According to Munsey, "the Ellamar Copper Mine had been a good producer during World War I but was worked out and closed by 1920. A well-built town had been left behind and some of the houses sold for as little as \$250. But there was no post office or store, and mail came once a month by boat. Margaret settled into the two-room combination dwelling and school. A janitor carried water and coal for her and light came from a kerosene lamp. She taught eight Native children, from 6 years and

up” (Munsey 1975:150).

⁶ For a comprehensive and well-documented history of the Chisana Gold Rush, see Bleakley 2007. Much of the information in this section is from this report. Also, see Kirchhoff 1989.

⁷ From the *Weekly Star* in Whitehorse, Canada on February 24, 1914 as cited in Bleakley 2007: 33, note #26.

⁸ Joseph Blas Davis was a former bridge carpenter who arrived in Chisana in 1916 and worked several different mining claims in the area (Bleakley 2006). He partnered with J. E. McCabe and E. R. Behling to work Big Eldorado No. 3 in 1917, mined an unidentified claim on Bonanza Creek with Don Greene in 1923, operated Little Eldorado No. 2 from 1929 to 1938 that he leased from Carl Whitham, and mined the adjoining claim on Skookum Creek in 1938. In 1948, Davis still owned mining claims in the area (Bleakley 2006:29).

⁹ Bleakley cites the original source as follows, but does not give a page number for the specific quote: Philip S. Smith, “Mineral Industry of Alaska in 1928.” In Philip S. Smith, et al., eds., *Mineral Resources of Alaska: Report on Progress of Investigations in 1928*. USGS Bulletin No. 813 (Washington: GPO, 1930), 27, 34-35.

¹⁰ Sid Johnston received his nickname from his propensity to unload freight on the Nizina and Rohn Glaciers when the weight got to be “too much” (Spude, Robert L. and Michael Lappen. “Chisana Historic District.” National Register Nomination, 1984. Copy in WRST files. As cited in Bleakley 2007:86).

¹¹ There is evidence that lynching was practiced by vigilantes during the Klondike Gold Rush, but more research is required to know whether this was carried out in the Wrangell-St. Elias area (Kirchhoff 2017).

¹² Different place names were used in McKennan’s time than today. What he refers to as the community of Nabesna is not where the Nabesna Mine was, but was at the confluence of the Nabesna and Tanana Rivers where the village now known as Northway currently sits. In order to reduce confusion, Craig Mishler and William Simeone, who edited and published McKennan’s journals, have distinguished these locations as Upper and Lower Nabesna, respectively (Mishler and Simeone 2006).

¹³ McKennan indicates that “Because of conditions Chisana has no mail service in October. Every other month in the year one mail trip is made” (Mishler and Simeone 2006:23). He is referring to the fact that it is in between seasons where “it is too late to risk traveling with horses and too early to use dogs” (Ibid).

¹⁴ Many of Alaska’s early miners were from other countries, including Italy, Norway, Sweden, Yugoslavia, and Croatia. For more about the Croatian and Yugoslavian history in Alaska, see *Bridges to Statehood: The Alaska-Yugoslav Connection* by Judy Ferguson (Big Delta, AK: Voice of Alaska Press, 2009).

¹⁵ For more about this trip including the route traveled, see Thorall 2006:AAF-9405.

¹⁶ Before his death, Ivan donated his archive of original films documenting many unique events in Alaska history to the Alaska Film Archives at Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks. For more about Ivan Thorall, see his obituary in the Fairbanks Daily News Miner newspaper (<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/newsminer/obituary.aspx?n=ivan-robert-thorall&pid=124005887>, accessed February 15, 2017).

¹⁷ During a 1998 oral history interview, Fairbanks resident Eric Larson, whose uncle Iver Johnson was good friends with Ivan Thorall, indicated that he owned Thorall’s former cabin in Chisana. Eric also indicated that the cabin had previously been owned by another former Chisana miner and resident, Andy Kimik (Larson 1998).

¹⁸ Jim Moody is still listed as an owner of a mining claim in the Gold Hill area, however, he has done little mining there since the late 1990s. His contracting and construction business in Anchorage provides his main source of income (J. Moody, pers comm.).

¹⁹ S. 506 - Mining Law Reform Act of 1995 (Sec. 203): “Prescribes patent issuance guidelines.

Amends the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1995 to repeal its proscription against the obligation of appropriated funds for processing patents for mining or mill site claims” (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/104th-congress/senate-bill/506>, accessed October 16, 2017).

²⁰ For more about Ray and Gloria McNutt, his guiding operation, and their time in Chisana and Horsfeld, see McNutt 2015. For more about the McNutt’s property and transfer of ownership, see Bleakley 2002:78 & 80 and Bleakley2007:68.

²¹ For more about Wrangell Outfitters, see their website at: <http://www.wrangelloutfitters.com>.

²² For a comprehensive and well-documented history of the Bremner Historic District, see White 2000. Much of the information in this section is from this report.

²³ For a detailed explanation of the various gold mining techniques used by small-scale miners throughout Alaska from the early to mid-20th century that were contemporaneous with operations in the Bremner District, see White 2000:31-40.

²⁴ For more about Asa Baldwin, see Alaska State Library, “A Guide to the Asa C. Baldwin Papers & Photographs in the Alaska Historical Library, Juneau” (Alaska State Library, Asa C. Baldwin collection, manuscript 36, 1978).

²⁵ For a more detailed history of aviation and airstrip construction at Bremner, see Ringsmuth 2012a.

²⁶ In White’s report, this quote is attributed as: “Paul Fretzs to Sylvia Baldwin, 17 April 1978. Courtesy of Sylvia Baldwin.”

²⁷ For more about the prospecting history of the Nabesna River, see Cole 1979. For more about the history of the Nabesna Mine itself and the gold deposits there, see Stanley 2002.

²⁸ For more about the Northway Airfield project and the role of the Nabesna Airfield and Bob Reeve, see “Airports for the War Effort,” by Lavell Wilson (“World War II Alaska,” *Alaska Geographic*, 1995, 22 (4)), and *In the Shadow of Eagles, Rudy Billberg’s Story* by Jim Rearden (Anchorage, AK: Alaska Northwest Books, 1992).

²⁹ For more about life in the mining town at Nabesna, see Stanley 2002:101-118.

³⁰ There is a possibility that an old mine shaft at the Nabesna Mine was used by the military during the Cold War in the 1950s as a secret survival cache along the escape route of US military bombers flying over Alaska. Caches were designed to assist American aircrews forced down in the remote Alaskan wilderness, and would have been supplied with one year’s worth of rations, medicine, weapons and ammunition, clothes, skis, snowshoes, sleeping bags, and blankets. There are rumors that a group of local men called the “Nabesna Faction” were trained in secret operations and military counter intelligence and were responsible for facilitating aircrew survival (Ringsmuth 2012a:75-77; Stanley 2002:129-133). While there is evidence of a secret government program to establish survival caches and use Alaskans as secret agents during the Cold War called the Alaska Project, and archeologists working near Reeve Field in the late 1970s discovered an old mine shaft boarded up with a sign that read “Government Property Keep Out,” there is no definitive evidence that the Nabesna Mine was ever used for this purpose or that the Nabesna Faction ever existed (Ibid). For more about the Alaska Project, see Bob K., “*The Alaskan Project: Secret Plans for Agents to Defend Alaska*,” *Gung-Ho Annuals*, 1986:54-60; *The Air Force Office of Special Investigation: 1948-2000*, US Air Force, Office of Special Investigations, 2000:118-124; D. Colt Denfeld, Jennifer Abel, and Dale Slaughter, *The Cold War in Alaska: A Management Plan for Cultural Resources*, US Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District, August, 1994:78; and *Counter Intelligence Corps: History and Mission in World War II*, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA, n.d.:64.

³¹ For more about the Conkle’s time in Nabesna and friendship with Harry Boyden, see Conkle and Rearden 1991.

³² For discussion of the history and implementation of NPS mining regulations, see Bleakley 2002:141-151.

³³ In 1985, the NPS was sued by the Sierra Club and The Alaska Center for the Environment for inadequate analysis of proposed mining operations. The court decision required the NPS to complete an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) evaluating the cumulative effect of further mining before issuing any mining permits. As a result, a court injunction was issued that barred the NPS from permitting any further mining until such EISs were completed. Investigations were launched to look at resources in and near areas where there were concentrations of claims. The work included studies of water quality and flows, soils, vegetation, fish, wildlife, and historic resources. This essentially shut down all mining and exploration until the EIS was finalized in early 1990. Also, the studies determined that whenever possible the NPS should purchase mining claims and restore the environment in the vicinity of previously mined areas (Bleakley 2002:144-147).

³⁴ For more about accessing inholdings and Right of Way Certificates of Access, see *An Interim User's Guide to Accessing Inholdings in National Park System Units in Alaska*, July 2007. Available at <https://www.nps.gov/akso/management/lands.cfm> (accessed January 17, 2017).

³⁵ Unfortunately, for this project we were not able to conduct oral history interviews with any miners currently active in the Wrangell-St. Elias area.

³⁶ For more about these NPS regulations, see <https://www.nps.gov/wrst/learn/management/gold-panning-and-collections-regulations.htm> (accessed January 17, 2017).

CHAPTER 4

OUT ON THE TRAIL: FUR TRAPPERS

Alaska's abundant populations of furbearers provide Alaskans with trapping opportunities. Although Alaska's winter days are short and cold, trapping draws Alaskans outdoors to witness spectacular scenery and the silent dramas told in tracks and sign in the snow (ADFG 2016a).

TRAPPING HISTORY

Trapping is deeply rooted in the lives and traditional cultures of Alaska's people and the subsistence lifestyle in rural Alaska.¹ Trapping has provided rural Alaskans with food, fur, clothing and income. "Using traplines handed down for generations, village trappers support traditional ways of life that are close to the land" (ADFG 2016b). In 2015, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game estimated there were 2,500 to 3,500 trappers in the state ranging from recreational trappers who keep the fur to those who are fairly serious to "a few very serious individuals who trap a lot of animals" (ADFG 2016a). Fish and Game also identifies marten as the most important species statewide, with other furbearers, ranked in order of importance by trappers as wolf, lynx, wolverine, beaver, fox, mink, red fox, otter, coyote, ermine (weasel) and muskrat (Ibid).

There is a long history of trapping in the Wrangell-St. Elias area by both Alaska Natives and non-Natives, but the following discussion will focus on non-Native trappers. The main species trapped are wolf, wolverine, fox, lynx, beaver, otter, muskrat, weasel (ermine) and marten. While trapping is no longer the dominant economic and cultural activity that it once was, there still are some residents for whom it continues to be a key part of their identity and lifestyle.

Fur trapping in Alaska began as a Native practice with the knowledge of the animals and the use of specific traplines being passed down from one generation to the next. Obtaining furs to be made into clothing was an essential part of the traditional Upper Tanana and Ahtna lifestyle. For most Alaska Natives raised along the river systems of interior Alaska during the first half of this century, trapping was a way of life based on a specialized yearly cycle. Those in the Wrangell-St. Elias area followed a similar pattern.

Leaving the village in the fall before freeze-up with the winters [sic] "grub stake," families headed up a tributary stream until they reached the main cabin. Before snowfall, wood had to be cut, and the winter supply of meat gotten. Soon after freeze-up the traps and snares would be set and from then until Christmas the trapper was moving, checking his trapline, then back to the cabin to skin and stretch fur. Some families travelled by dog team to the village at Christmas time to visit with friends, to celebrate the holiday, and trade furs to the trader in exchange for store goods.

After the holidays the families returned to the trapline routine until spring when the orientation shifted from the major fur animals to beaver and muskrat. Most families stayed out on their traplines until spring breakup (Schneider 1980:16-17).

Success as a trapper demanded extensive knowledge of the environment and animal behavior, patience with setting snares made of animal sinew and later steel leg-hold traps, and knowing the right place to put them and ensuring no human scent was left behind. It also required consistently cutting and maintaining trapline trails, some of which covered over one hundred miles of wild country, and the diligence of going out nearly every day to check your traps. It was undesirable and considered inhumane to leave an animal in a trap. Some animals have been known to chew off their own foot to get away from a leg-hold trap. Also it is critical that dead animals are retrieved as quickly as possible



Nelson McCrary with successful fur harvest. Harry and Norma Hoyt family papers, Archives and Special Collections, Consortium Library, University of Alaska Anchorage.

so as not to attract scavengers and preserve the integrity of the fur. In the early period, a man would walk his trapline on snowshoes or use a dog team. In more recent times, as snowmachines became more common and reliable, they are now the dominant method of transportation. A trapline can be checked in less time by snowmachine, and so can be accomplished in conjunction with the schedule of regular employment.

Once non-Natives began to enter the region, the Upper Tanana and Ahtna discovered that their fur wealth had even more value. They first traded fur with early Russians and Americans for supplies they were now getting a taste for, such as tea, flour and sugar, or for cash.² As the demand for fur increased in the United States, as well as around the world, for things like top hats made from felted beaver fur or fox fur muffs for women, there was a lucrative market for Alaskan species.³ Non-Native traders moved into the area to be middlemen between the Native trappers and the fur buyers in Canada and the Lower 48 states. Some traders, like Lawrence DeWitt of Slana, set up permanent trading posts where Natives brought their furs in exchange for non-Native food items, clothing, and supplies. Lawrence DeWitt was born about 1891 and reached Alaska in 1910. Settling in Slana about 1914, he married, Belle, the daughter of Chistochina Chief Nicolai, and raised foxes, mined, and operated a trading

post and roadhouse for over 20 years. He disappeared in 1937 while walking on the frozen Copper River (Bleakley 2006:30).

Other traders, like John Hajdukovich who came to Alaska in 1904 and traded along the upper Tanana up to Northway, traveled to communities or family camps and bought furs from the Natives.⁴ Some paid in cash, others paid in credit at the nearby store, while others brought actual goods to exchange directly for the furs. The fur trade created a new way of life in the Wrangell-St. Elias area and shifted the balance of power between the original Native inhabitants and the newly arrived non-Natives.

The trading post operator maintained a running tab, which helped the Native people bank against hard times, but also tied them in a patron-client relationship to the trader. For this reason, the trading post operator took over many of the economic functions of the 19th Century denés. The position of dené became obsolete once the trader lived permanently in the community. The need to organize the production of furs, the subsistence quest, the trading party, and the redistribution of trading goods

as well as subsistence resources no longer existed. ...The position of dené was not the only traditional role that became obsolete during this period. Americans settling in the area took over the economic and social roles of not only the trader, but also the roles of the judge (kaskaé), the nurse and doctor (sleep-doctor), and the teacher (matrilineal relatives) (Reckord 1979:39).

By the 1910s, newly settled non-Natives in the region realized the lucrative nature of trapping and began to move into the business. Some learned from their Native neighbors and even cooperated on traplines. Others competed with the local Alaska Native trappers and either pushed them out or just took over existing traplines. For any trapper, success is driven as much by the overall health of the fur market, the demands of fashion, and the prices being paid for wild fur, as it is by the fluctuations in environmental conditions and animal populations. Sometimes a trapper might have a good year, earning a lot of money because he was able to catch a lot of animals and fur prices were high. Other years the same trapper might hit a slump as either the prices dropped so each pelt had a lower value, or there was a low point in the animal's regular population cycle. For example, as Lavell Wilson, a trapper in Tok who grew up in Northway in the 1940s and 1950s, describes:

I remember my dad talking about when he first started trapping he could go way the hell up to where they went in the Black Hills and never see a marten track across there. Only in the Black Hills would he find marten. And then years later, there would be a fair amount of them, but this was always good lynx country, too. But lynx go up and down with the rabbits basically. If you want to find lynx you go where there's rabbits otherwise you're not going to find many of them. And the lynx have been down lately. Oh, I remember when I was trapping around Northway in the mid to late 1950s, the lynx were really thick. I mean you could get a hundred a year, but not no more. And the rabbits have been down for years and years. They come up a little, but nothing like they used to be. In the mid to late '60s, there were so many rabbits they were chewing the telephone poles down along the road (Wilson 2013).

Or, as David James, an avid trapper who lives along the Alaska Highway near Northway, explains:

I started trapping marten on the Taylor Highway in 1959 with the car. In a month I caught 19 marten. The next year I trapped a little bit longer and I got 31. And then the third year, I got 57. In the fourth year, Fred Terwilliger from Tok who was working up there on the highway said to me, "I saw three in a week." You're going to make a killing up there." I went up and there were tracks all over, but I only caught two. Two years in a row, I caught only two. When I had caught almost 60 that one year. So, yeah, they vary (James 2015).

Brothers Earl and Nelson McCrary from Copper Center trapped from 1911 to 1914 in the foothills of Mount Drum, Mount Sanford and Mount Wrangell. Born in Guthrie, Oklahoma, they came with their family to Alaska in 1904 and settled on a homestead at Copper Center. Over the years, various members of the family operated a fox farm, managed the Dry Creek trading post, and ran Yost's Roadhouse. Nelson hauled freight with a horse and sled on the Richardson Highway from 1912 to 1915 (McCrary 1947a), and Earl and Nelson had traplines up and down the Sanford River, Caribou Creek and Boulder Creek. As Nelson describes: "It was an easy trip the first day, eighteen miles to the foot of Mt. Drum, and after a good night's rest, we would be off on the fifteen mile trip remaining to the main cabin on the bank of the Sanford River" (McCrary 1997:22). They trapped red, cross

and silver fox, marten, lynx, and wolverine. While trapping was a lot of hard work with many hours spent out on the cold trail, it could pay off well. When the McCrarys were trapping, “Silver and half black foxes were bringing in around five hundred dollars, with a live cross fox or silver being worth double that amount” (Ibid:23). In the winter of 1915, Nelson McCrary shifted his trapping area to the Gulkana River from Dry Creek out to Charlie Lake and down the Gulkana. “At that time the country around there was alive with all kinds of fur bearing animals, and it seemed to me that this would be a good place to pick up a few quick dollars” (McCrary 1998:11).

An active trapper of the 1920s was Clyde “Slim” Williams who ran traplines from cabins on the Copper and Gulkana Rivers and Caribou Creek on the slopes of Mount Sanford, and from a winter camp on the Gakona River.⁵ Slim Williams arrived in Alaska in 1900 and spent the next three decades hunting and trapping in the Copper River valley.⁶ He would trade his furs with buyers at Gakona and Gulkana for cash and food supplies, and proceed to start the cycle all over again the following year (Gallaher and Gallaher 2004). “A buyer for pelts came through the valley to buy pelts from the trappers during the trapping season. There was no other outlet to sell furs. That’s how we sold our pelts” (Gallaher 2013:53). Elliott W. Miller in Gulkana was one such fur dealer. Each year, he “would travel across the Copper River valley to visit trappers and fox farmers. He would purchase quality furs that would bring in a good price at auction houses in Seattle” (US DOI NPS 2013:56)

In 1929/1930, anthropologist Robert McKennan spent the winter in Chisana, at Cooper Creek village, and at the village now known as Northway. McKennan’s diary entries include frequent references to both Native and non-Native trappers and freighters and a number of non-Native traders around the region (Mishler and Simeone 2006).⁷ Trappers appear much more frequently in McKennan’s diary entries while he is in the Nabesna River region than in Chisana. McKennan mentions at least thirteen individual non-Native trappers wintering in the Nabesna River area alone, along with most of the Native residents going out trapping. McKennan lived in the cabin of Bill Myers, a white trapper on the upper Nabesna who then moved to Batzulnetas Creek to go into partnership with Tommy Jackson, who was Nabesna John’s cousin (Mishler and Simeone 2006:48). Bleakley’s list of Wrangell Mountain residents includes additional trappers not mentioned by McKennan including Fred Bronniche who settled in Slana in 1936, Milton Kunkel who spent the winter of 1929-1930 trapping and prospecting around Horsfeld, and a few who were trapping in the upper Gulkana River (Bleakley 2006).

Trapping was one of the main ways of making a living in the winter. Some of the trappers that McKennan crossed paths with were miners from Chisana who stayed and needed something to do in the winter to earn some extra cash. Some were freighters who also trapped while they were out on the trail. For others, although relatively few, trapping was the sole source of their livelihood. However, what they were able to earn depended on the fur market as well as on the productivity of the season. According to McKennan, the winter of 1930 was one of the low points in the trapping cycle. “This is an unusually poor year for furs. I have been in good country all winter and have seen scarcely a dozen lynx and fox skins, all of distinctly average quality” (Ibid:99). This made for a spartan year for the men out on their traplines; they had to work hard or have luck to catch much in their traps. He specifically mentions at least one trapper, Carl Hult, who was “quitting for good” because he just could not make a living (Ibid:76). While this was not good news for Hult, it ended up benefiting McKennan: “I bought four pounds of bacon and three pounds of coffee from him, a veritable gift at fifty cents a pound” (Ibid). In this way, the poor trapping season still ended up making a contribution to the local economy through the re-distribution of fresh goods and money.

The trade and sale of furs was a critical part of the trapping economy that McKennan witnessed. Fur traders, just like the trappers, made a good living when the fur prices were high. The largest traders when McKennan was in the area were Ted Lowell and Milo Hajdukovich who operated posts at Tanana Crossing, Tetlin, and Northway.

A newcomer blew into town today, a white trapper, called Blackie. He and his partner have been trapping on the Chisana about 75 miles from here [Tetlin]. He brought down his season's catch and sold it to Milo for \$200. Pretty slim picking for a hard winter's work. He had one coyote, two lynx, five mink, and ten weasel (Mishler and Simeone 2006:95).

Lowell and Hajdukovich also traveled the region by dog team in the winter and boat in the summer collecting furs and providing basic food and supplies, such as flour, rice, tea, sugar, and canned goods. In contrast, local trappers had to travel long distances to get to other traders, like Herman Kessler at Scottie Creek near the mouth of Gardiner Creek but who also traded at Northway and had a store at Chisana; Charles Simons who operated a store in Chisana from 1914 until his death in 1929; Earl Hirst at Chistochina (McKenna 1959; Haynes and Simeone 2007); and Lawrence Dewitt at Slana (Mishler and Simeone 2006).

McKenna's notes provide an important record of how much money trappers got from the traders for their furs. He says that one man earned \$3,000 to \$4,000 two years previously (Ibid:115). His comments also demonstrate that trapping supported an intricate, indirect network of associated trade. The money earned from trapping was a critical part of the economy. While much of the fur sale and trading that McKenna discusses was by Native trappers, the scenario was probably similar among all the trappers at the time.

Andy sold a red fox for \$47.50 and a coyote skin for \$17.50. He then turned around and bought the cheapest kind of a ready made [sic] suit for \$20 and four colored shirts at \$2.50 each. Joe being an older and wiser head took \$50 for his lynx and then bought a new rifle, tea, tobacco and candles (Ibid:73-74).

For the most part, from McKenna's reporting, it appears that the Native and non-Native trappers got along. Nevertheless, they most certainly would have been competing for the same good traplines, as well as for the good prices from the fur buyers. McKenna does imply that in some cases Natives were not given the best prices (Ibid:99). However, one possible conflict he hints at is in relation to trapline territory. Three men who operated a quartz property near Fairbanks in the summer "were then putting in a trapping camp at the head of Platinum Creek. Their trapping territory is claimed by John [Nabesna John]. I prophesy that he is going to be pretty sore when he arrives up there, if he ever does" (Ibid:79).

A final thing that becomes obvious from McKenna's journal is how much people were traveling and moving around, even in the coldest and darkest part of the winter. There seemed to be a daily flow of people in and out of each of the communities, except when the weather turned especially poor with blizzards reducing visibility. Trappers were regularly traveling by dog team from their trapline camps and cabins to the trading posts and surrounding communities, whether for trading their furs, buying supplies, receiving medical attention, or just to visit. In one particular instance, trapper Bill Myers came out of the woods for a particularly unusual reason.

Bill baked a tremendous batch of bread today. Hot biscuits for supper and how good they taste. You wouldn't think a fifty-year-old bachelor would mush dogs twenty miles in 30 below weather just to bake, would you? It is surprising what good cooks this country produces (Ibid:66).

There was an extensive network of winter trails that these trappers, and other travelers, used like superhighways. "The trails were the connecting link for mail, people, and the latest news that traveled



Preparing to hit the trail with a loaded dog sled, circa 1925. Courtesy of Eleanor Tjosevig and Dick Anderson.

from camp to camp, roadhouse to roadhouse” (Schneider 2012:x). These pathways left a tell-tale sign on the landscape of a way of life that no longer exists. First airplanes, and now maintained roads and automobiles, have changed not only how people get from place to place, but how they identify with the land. They no longer know where those old well-worn trails led through the woods, across rivers, and over glaciers. They do not know the distinct landmarks and features that would guide travelers like street signs or milepost markers do today. They do not know the history of activity and settlement that once dominated life along the trails. As William Schneider notes in his book *On Time Delivery: The Dog Team Mail Carriers* (Schneider 2012), the shift from mostly dog team travel to aviation led to abandonment of a vast trail network and a way of life based in small encampments, mining camps, or communities interspersed among long stretches of wilderness. While there continues to be some snowmachine travel along traplines and trails in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, there are signs that a previously vital communication and transportation link and land-based life is disappearing, and as Schneider suggests has resulted in a generation of rural Alaskans who have few ties to an overland system that supported their grandparents. Without knowing and personally experiencing place, the young people and newcomers to the region begin to have a different understanding of the landscape. It becomes just a terrain of physical features instead of a network of places imbued with story that provide navigational assistance and connection to the environment.

With the onset of the Depression, the demand for furs declined as did the price a trapper could earn on each pelt.⁸ Although, as Lavell Wilson observes, some trappers got creative in their efforts to make the most money:

I know my dad used to buy fur when he lived in Northway. ...He always got a kick out of Bill Johnson of the Scottie Creek band [on the Canadian border]. If fur was selling high over here, they were Americans. If fur was selling higher

over there [in Canada], or the coyote bounty was over there, or a wolf bounty, you know, they were Canadians. They weren't no dummies (Wilson 2008).

Trapping continued around the Wrangell-St. Elias area into the 1940s and 1950s, and still continues today, although, it is no longer as lucrative or dependable for providing a family's sole livelihood. International fur prices dropped during World War II as the fashion industry, which had previously been one of the largest markets, changed priorities and the global economy was focused on military weaponry and facing the realities of war (Ray 1990). While there was some price recovery after the war, the fur market has remained quite volatile, given its reliance on a product whose availability is highly influenced by the fluctuations of nature and a market driven by the whims of personal and cultural desires for fur, as well as by political pressures about the social acceptability of trapping and fur use.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Chitina was one place where trapping remained an important part of life. In the late 1940s, Big Jake Severtsen was a trapper out of Chitina who ran a trapline on the Chitina River to the Copper River. He also was a guide, hunter, and mountain climber (Clarke 2002:24-25). According to an article dated January 1958 in O.A. Nelson's paper, the *Ghost Town Gazette*, there were at least two trappers still active in the area at that time: Paddy King, who trapped south of town; and Billy Buck, who trapped out the road to the north. "Each has gotten about a dozen lynx and Billy has trapped and shot several wolves on the east side of the Copper River" (Clarke 2002:60). For some in Chitina, like Adina Knutson, whose husband Howard was a pilot based there from the mid-1950s to mid-1960s, trapping offered a perfect opportunity to get herself outdoors during the winter months and make a little money at the same time. "When she had a deluxe trap line south of Chitina past the second tunnel by Haley Creek, Adina would skin, stretch, and dry all the animals she caught and some others. Her last day trapping for the season, Adina took Tony [her son] along and caught five lynx" (D. Knutson n.d.). In the 1970s, brothers Ralph and Bob Lohse were well known trappers along the McCarthy Road. They would regularly run a trapline from their home at Long Lake, which is about forty miles from Chitina. At the McCarthy end, Gary Green and Fred Denner were actively trapping starting in the mid-1970s. During this same period and into the 1980s, the Ellis family trapped on the Nabesna side, along with Dean Wilson Sr. who had been trapping from his Kenny Lake homestead since about 1965.

Even if trapping was not a main reason for settling in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, many folks who set up residence or established homesteads went trapping, especially in the early days when it was critical to do anything and everything to make a living. The area was rich in fur wealth, and with determination, a critical eye for the nuances of the natural world, and the desire and willingness to learn the habits of the furbearers, a trapper could be quite successful. It was noted even as late as the late 1970s and early 1980s that for most people living along the Tok Cut-Off, "trapping is a way of life" (Reckord 1983a:262). Holly Reckord described a 1976 interview with a Chistochina trapper about the role of trapping as follows:

The year 1976 was one of the best years for trapping that she had seen in her 30 years of residency in the area. Furthermore, she said that between Gakona and Mentasta there were currently "no openings," meaning that every possible trapping line is occupied. This includes the drainages coming down the north and west slopes of the Wrangell Mountains from the Sanford Glacier, as well as lands not classified as (d)(2) on the west bank of the Copper River (Ibid:260-261).

Another trapper gave a detailed list of his harvest and how important it was for sustaining the household:

He said that he took between 5 and 20 fox and between 6 and 50 marten. During his 25 years of trapping he has seen only one high period in the lynx cycle, and he was able to take 40 animals that year. Other years he would be lucky to take even one. In a season, he might take up to three wolves, an average of three wolverines (which he would consider a good take), and about two coyotes, and eight mink. Muskrat takes vary significantly, and they are not taken until the price for each pelt is high enough to make the endeavor worthwhile. His wife told the author that trapping “buys the groceries.” ...While this Chistochina woman figures that trapping buys all their groceries in a year, she readily admits that the costs incurred by the modern-day trapping techniques used by her husband, including snowmobiles and dogs, traps, expensive clothing, and maintenance of a line cabin, probably cut deeply into any profits they might make (Ibid:261-262).

Ralph Lohse sums up how reliant many families were on trapping, even in the 1970s: “Trapping was our source of income. There’s a lot a years that without trapping, we wouldn’t have had much of an income” (Lohse 2010). Eventually, Lohse expanded into commercial fishing in the summer to supplement his income so that he could continue to live the remote lifestyle he so enjoyed the rest of the year. This made him less dependent solely upon trapping to support his family. Both fishing and trapping can be unpredictable, however, being influenced by natural forces such as weather, population dynamics, and competition from other users.

In recent times, trapping has declined as a means of support for residents of the Wrangell-St. Elias area, with more lucrative jobs now available in the area, such as road construction, working on the pipeline, or jobs with a Native corporation or the National Park Service. Some people continue to seriously pursue trapping, but “a serious trapper must make a substantial investment in equipment, must have good health, and, finally, must have an interest and zest for the endeavor. Others, generally younger men, trap from time to time according to the price of the furs and a need for cash” (Reckord 1983a:107). For the less serious trappers, it is more recreational where they just run short traplines to earn a few extra dollars or to supply furs for their own personal use in clothing or artwork. Moya James sewed a graduation dress for her daughter decorated with tails from weasels that her husband, David, had trapped. In contrast, trappers like Sue Entsminger of Tok and Lena Charley of Chistochina and trappers’ wives like Ada Wilson, whose husband Dean Wilson Sr. trapped near Kenny Lake, and Joy Hobbs, whose husband Steve traps out of Slana, sew much of the family’s fur harvest into hats or other items that they sell directly to consumers. But making money is not the only motivation for all trappers. For many, it is more than this. It is “the enjoyment gained from this type of life and the zest for outdoor activity that is common of many of the trappers in this area” (Ibid:261).

Most confess that the monetary rewards are quite small, but that by trapping, their lives become worthwhile, unique and exciting. ...They do not trap simply to make money; they trap because it is part of their total relationship with the world and with nature (Ibid:261-262).

In 2010, Bruce James similarly described his motivation for trapping being more about the experience than any monetary gains:

It’s the opportunity to be out in the woods with a mission in the wintertime. To be in the solitude and quiet of our wilderness here. It’s a very cleansing thing for us to go out, just the two of us on snowshoes and be in the solitude of the winter against the elements. Our challenge is not so much to catch the animals, our challenge is to

do physical exercise – work our way across terrain – in the wintertime on a regular basis despite what the weather throws at us. The challenge of being able to interpret the animal sign that we see is another motivation, and the lowest of our motivations is actually catching the animals. We don't have to catch very much to be enjoying ourselves. But if we didn't catch any, we would probably not do it (James 2010).

The trapping season is based on when the pelts of the fur-bearing animals will be at their prime. Usually it occurs after the first snowfall when it is easier to see tracks and therefore determine where the animals are and how they are moving. Although it varies by where in Alaska you are, the trapping season typically is from November to February. However, trapping, like many subsistence activities, is not limited to just one season. It is a way of life that spans the entire year. The best trappers prepare their gear and traps before the season starts so they are all ready to hit the trail when the first snow falls and the official legal trapping season is open. The more days you are out trapping, the greater the chances of having a larger harvest, so the best trappers try to take advantage of the full extent of the season as much as possible.

In the past, preparation included keeping your traps in good working condition, ensuring that your trapline trail was brushed out and cleared of downed trees so it would be passable, and making certain your trapline cabins were fully supplied. And for men like Slim Williams who used a dog team, he had to ensure all the dog harnesses were in good repair and that his sled was intact with good sled runners on it. For many, being prepared also meant shuttling supplies into remote cabins or camps before the actual trapping season to be sure you had what you would need when you arrived in the cold of the winter. As Nelson McCrary explains, "Before the first slush ice started running in the Copper River, we would take four or five of our best swimming horses and pack our outfit over to the main cabin on the Sanford River" (McCrary 1997:22). In 1929, when Nelson McCrary trapped on the Gulkana River above Sourdough with his partner K.J. Rickey of Chitina, they took gas and supplies in by boat in the summer/fall after trucking it to Sourdough (McCrary 1998). And then there was one year when Slim Williams made a multi-day hiking trip in the summer from his Copper River cabin to go back to a camp on the Gakona River to retrieve supplies to be used the following season on a different trapline (Gallaher and Gallaher 2004:82-88).

This emergency preparedness is an aspect of trapping that continues today. For example, in 2010 Dave Bruss of Tonsina says that through his twenty-five years of trapping he has left emergency supplies like food, extra gas, and even a spare snowmachine engine at cabins along his trail.

Because I'm so far down there and it's such rugged country – 30 feet of snow is the average snow fall down there and you can have four to five feet overnight – it doesn't matter how good of a trail you have, it's gone right away or ten minutes after you make it. So you have to be able to get out of there yourself 'cause nobody'll ever even find you" (Bruss 2010).

And for those like Slim Williams, who relied upon a dog team for trapline transportation, being sure to have enough dog food was part of preparing for trapping. This included summer fishing for salmon for dog food as well as for human food and to sell in exchange for essential items that needed to be purchased.

After the river was flowing normally and the salmon began to head upstream to their spawning grounds, it was time to install the fish wheel. Slim set it up on a tripod in the Copper River about two feet from the bank. As the current turned it, the big wheel, which had two large buckets attached, scooped up fish and tossed them into a floating

box right beside the contraption. At the peak of the season, each turn yielded about two fish per revolution and we rejoiced.

Slim had made drying racks, and we got busy cleaning the fish for curing. We were catching about a thousand pounds a day, and we worked day and night to keep up with the flow...

After the fish were dried, we stored them in the high cache—a storage room built on stilts to keep animals from robbing it—to use for feeding the dogs. Besides being delicious food for both humans and our team, salmon was a source of income for Slim and Aileen, as there was a good market for it in the winter (Gallaher and Gallaher 2004:108-109).

Of course, the work of trapping does not end after a successful catch on the trail. The animals have to be skinned, and the skins stretched and dried, and prepared for sale. And then after the season closed, a trapper who was not just trapping for himself and his family, would have to make a trip to the nearest trading post or town to sell his furs to a fur buyer who would then send the pelts to other parts of the United States or the world to be used in the fur industry. In some cases, if you were lucky, the fur buyer might come to you, but mostly trappers had to take their pelts to local trading posts. In the 1920s, '30s and '40s, the Chistochina Trading Post was one such fur buying hub in the upper Copper River valley.

The days passed by much too quickly, and when the trapping season was over, we headed for home to Gulkana. The trip down the creek was much easier because we had made a trail on our hard journey up. We arrived home tired but happy. Still, there was much work to be done in connection with the trapping. Furs had to be put on drying racks and fleshed. Slim did most of that, as he knew how. Then, after the pelts were finished, he took them to the fur buyers. When he returned, we all rejoiced, because it had been a good season (Gallaher and Gallaher 2004:152).

In the 1970s and 1980s, Dean Wilson Sr. became a fur buyer and based his operation out of his home near Kenny Lake. Today, most trappers bypass using a local fur buyer as a middleman and mail their furs directly to buyers in Seattle or other parts of the Lower 48 or sell their furs at auction. For example, David James sends his furs to an auction house in Montreal, with the Russians being big consumers of fur. One large Alaska auction is the annual fur auction sponsored by the South Central Chapter of the Alaska Trappers Association held during the Fur Rendezvous winter festival in Anchorage at the end of February or the beginning of March. Another fur auction sponsored by the Alaska Trappers Association is held in mid-March in Fairbanks, usually in conjunction with the Open North American Championship Sled Dog Race. If you wish to buy, barter, or resell animal skins it is still possible to obtain a fur dealer license in Alaska, but there are few official large-scale local fur buyers left.

TRAPPING TECHNOLOGY

There are many ways to capture furbearers and preferred techniques for each species or location, with far too many details to go into here.⁹ However, a few of the main techniques include snares made out of moose or caribou sinew hung in the willows to capture small animals like hares as they traveled through; deadfall traps for larger animals such as wolves or wolverines where bait is laid underneath a large piece of wood or rock held up by sticks that would fall on top of the animal as it grabs the bait; or hanging a snare down through a hole in the ice to catch a beaver as it swims by. By the late 1800s, commercially produced steel, leg-hold traps became the most popular method

for trapping in Interior Alaska, and sinew snares have been replaced by ones made of cable or picture wire held together with toggles; small loops for hares and larger for wolves. Another popular trap has been the Conibear trap invented by Canadian Victor Conibear in 1957 that is designed to grip the animal's body and deliver a killing blow (Alaska Trappers and Alaska Department of Fish and Game 1991). Then there is the technique called spotlighting that Dean Wilson Sr. says men in Northway used in the 1940s to harvest furbearer species with a firearm instead of with a trap:

When the lynx cycle was very high, my dad and some other men in Northway would get a car running and hunt lynx at night. At that time, almost every vehicle had spotlights on the side. You could look way ahead with your spotlight. If they were lucky, they might get half a dozen lynx in one night (Dean Wilson Sr. interview in Zarnke 2013:105)

This technique produces higher harvest levels than trapping, and so is still used by some hunters for specific species.

Traplines can run as short as two miles near home or as long as thirty, fifty, seventy or one hundred miles. These longer lines usually are set up as a circular route from a cabin or campsite. The longer lines can take several days to check, while nowadays for those who have full-time jobs their shorter routes can be covered in an evening or on weekends. Native women trappers also often set short lines near their houses for useful animals like rabbits that they could easily check in a day and return back home at night. In the early days of trapping, a trapper would spend long periods out in the wilderness. They were recognized for their wilderness skills, including navigation and animal tracking. For most of the trapping season, the trapper would be out checking his traps every day or out at his trapline cabins. He was rarely at home. Some trappers would run a number of short traplines so they were able to return to a warm cabin every night, either their main home cabin or a small shelter cabin built along the route specifically for trapping (Reckord 1983a:64-66). Samme Gallaher describes the trapping cabin she and her sister, Aileen, used with Slim Williams at Caribou Creek in 1928, which was probably typical of trapping shelters at the time:

The cabin was very small for three people, especially when one was a man as big as Slim. It was nine by twelve feet, and the bunk took up almost half the floor space. A little Yukon stove was in one corner, and a rickety table filled the other. For chairs, we sat on the bunk. When we arrived, the dirt floor was frozen like everything else. But when our fire started to warm up, the floor began to thaw out. So what did we have then? Why, mud, of course. ...The one window was very small but gave us a little light. The door opening was almost square, being only slightly higher than it was wide, and we had to step up about a foot to get in or out. ...Our door covering, a piece of heavy canvas with a heavy blanket hung over it at night, was adequate to keep out the cold (Gallaher and Gallaher 2004:100).

Life on the trapline was remote and rough living. It meant dealing with frigid temperatures, deep snow and possible overflow on rivers, living in a small shelter without running water or electricity, cutting firewood, caring for dogs or a snowmachine, being far from other people or supplies, and sleeping on a bunk made of logs and covered with a layer of spruce boughs for cushion and insulation. A mattress was a luxury and cause for excitement (Gallaher and Gallaher 2004:103). On some traplines, instead of a cabin a winter camp was set up with a canvas wall tent heated with a small woodstove. As Aileen Gallaher describes:

The walls of the olive drab tent crowded close to a hand-hewed table, a bunk made of small logs, a mattress of spruce needles, Hudson's Bay blankets, and an airtight heater. Firewood was stacked behind the stove. Under the table was boxed grub—beans, flour, sugar, dried fruits—and magazines, guns, axes, dog harnesses and rope. The tent was warm and cozy, and the caribou stew was beginning to boil, filling the air with its delicious aroma. I could sit comfortably on the bunk and stir the steaming caribou hocks, while the subzero atmosphere pressed at the twelve-ounce canvas (Gallaher and Gallaher 2004:51).

In the late 1960s, Ralph Lohse used tiny dilapidated structures for emergencies and stopovers along his trapline route on the upper Nizina and Chitina rivers.

Any place that you thought was a good place for a line cabin, if you looked hard enough you could find the evidence of a cabin, or the remains of a cabin. I don't know if you could give some of them the qualification of calling them cabins in the sense of the word that they were cabins. They were wood pup tents. They weren't very big. A shack would probably even be an exaggeration. Couple of them were places you could crawl into. The ones up the Lakina were six foot wide, eight foot long, four foot high with lotsa moss, moss on top of it. They had a wood stove in it. They were caves, right. There weren't any windows, and there wasn't much of anything else, but it was just nice to know they were there in case you had a breakdown (Lohse 2010).

And as Ralph adds, these old cabins and shelters were left fully stocked with firewood, matches, and other essential non-perishable supplies so that you could go inside and have shelter for the night. Trappers kept these places for their own safety, but also were available to other travelers who might need them in an emergency (Ibid). Now, of course, over time many of these shelters have collapsed or disappeared, such as one on the Lakina River that Ralph says no longer exists because the bend in the river it was on has eroded away (Ibid).

TRAPPING PARTNERS

Running a trapline was often a solitary affair: a man and his dog team (and in later periods a snowmachine) traveling the trail. Self-reliance and resourcefulness were basic requirements for survival. But being a loner trapper or mountain man enjoying the peace and solitude of living and working alone in the wilderness did not apply to all trappers in the Wrangell-St. Elias area. Sometimes trappers would form partnerships, such as Nelson McCrary with his brother or K.J. Rickey; Slim Williams, who married in 1926, was accompanied by his wife, Aileen, and at times also Aileen's sister, Samme, for several years until they divorced; or Lavell and Dean Wilson's father who partnered with Oscar Albert, a Native man in Northway. Wilderness friendships often were based on common cause, mutual trust, and a willingness to work. Benefits of a partner included having someone to help with the dog team, having another team to carry a large load of either supplies or pelts, or having someone to be there if you got stuck. There was safety in numbers if something happened and you had an accident, ran into overflow, fell through ice, or had to spend the night out on the trail. "I trapped with a partner on the river because the ice was always so shaky. I wanted to have someone with me who'd pull me out when I went in" (Wilson 2010). Samme Gallaher explains how having another person was helpful to Slim Williams:

He checked the traps every day, weather permitting, and I got to go with him most of the time. If I didn't go, Aileen would go with him, and sometimes we would all go.

It was a big help for Slim to have one of us control the dogs while he took care of the traps. The team was usually very manageable, but there was always a chance that the dogs might see some caribou and give chase. With our help, Slim could get over the trap line in considerably less time than it would have taken him alone (Gallaher and Gallaher 2004:101).



Tommy Hyke standing with snowshoes and holding a fox, circa 1910. Harry and Norma Hoyt family papers, Archives and Special Collections, Consortium Library, University of Alaska Anchorage.

The camaraderie and cooperative nature of trapping is apparent in more recent times, where there are many examples of trappers working with partners. For example, Dave Bruss of Tonsina indicated that he sometimes would trap with a partner and they would split the line in half, each doing a section. “Primarily, it’s so that we can cover this huge area that’s almost too big for one person to handle by themselves. Although, there’s a lotta guys that just want a partner with them all the time in case something happens, so they’re not stranded out there by themselves, too” (Bruss 2010). Dean Wilson Jr, who traps in the Kenny Lake area, often joins forces with his friend, Dave Bruss, when one of them needs help breaking trail after a big snowfall, when moving a lot of equipment, or just to have another person around to help in case you get your snowmachine stuck (Wilson and Wilson 2010). Don Horrell, who has been trapping out of Tazlina since 1971, mentions that another benefit of having a trapping partner is that there is always someone to check the sets in case one person has to work, is too busy, or can not get out on a particular day due to bad weather (Horrell 2010). No matter the reason, when trapping with a partner whatever is caught is always split equally (Bruss 2010; Horrell 2010; Wilson 2010). In contrast, when trapping with a partner one might push things a bit farther than is safe because you know you have someone else there to help out. “When you don’t have a partner, you really have to

pack heavier and you have to stay more in the clear and you have to be a little bit more conservative” (Wilson and Wilson 2010).

In contrast, Nelson McCrary, had no choice but to go alone into the wilderness to trap. He left his family in Cordova so his children could go to school, and trapping provided a reliable income. “I sure hated to head back into the woods for three months alone, but with the promise that I would be home for Christmas, I took the train back to Chitina” (McCrary 1998:14). He was hoping to catch marten which at the time was “quick money.” Unfortunately, despite being out until five days before Christmas, that year he caught nothing (Ibid).

Just as with some of the early homesteaders, the solitude of life in an isolated cabin could be too much for some trappers, especially after a long winter. This is where the roadhouses come into play as important gathering places. “The role they played in pioneering of Copper River valley has been largely forgotten. They were important to me because they offered shelter, friendship, hospitality, and, most important, a sense of home. Each one satisfied in some way that great need for companionship and camaraderie in this vast, remote country” (Gallaher 2009:126). Aileen Gallaher and Slim Williams would regularly travel the seven miles from their cabin to Gakona for mail and supplies and for a little bit of socializing. Others traveled much farther.

TRANSPORTATION AND ACCESS

As with all other subsistence activities in the region, transportation and access are important factors for trapping. Historically, a trapper would go check his traps by walking his trail in snowshoes. As dog teams became more prevalent, the dog sled became the standard mode of operation.

By the early 1970s, snowmachines were introduced to the area and freight records showing the amount of dog food flown in versus fuel indicate a complete shift to snowmachines in the early 1980s as the preferred method of transportation for trappers. Snowmachines are the most efficient way for trappers to travel over frozen and snow covered ground, and are especially suited for breaking a trail. Even in deep snow, after a few passes, a smooth, hard-packed trail forms, which can be traveled on at high speeds. Snowmachines allowed a trapper to cover a larger area in a shorter time, so were quickly adopted by local residents who tend to select the best available technology for a job that needs to be done – chainsaws over cross-cut saws, dredging over hand panning, dogs over walking, and snowmachines over dogs. While dog teams were quieter and did not require the money needed to buy gas for a snowmachine, they needed to be fed, which meant a lot of time spent in the summer fishing for dog food or hunting for meat, or making money to buy commercial dog kibble. “Using a snow machine is a lot easier. You can turn it off during the summer” (Denner 2010). The benefit of a dog team is that they usually can find their way home on a trail, while with a snowmachine, the driver has to know the way. Even with modern GPS, it is a good idea to be familiar with the territory and terrain in which you are traveling. There are many places within the Wrangell-St. Elias area where it is easy to get lost. Dave Bruss of Copper Center explains why he stopped using a dog team on his trapline:

I had a dog team and I soon found that that doesn’t work here. It’s too slow. You need way too many cabins and you can’t cover the amount of country that you need to make a living at it. In this part of Alaska, the furbearer populations aren’t great enough to trap hard enough to make a living at it with a dog team when you can only cover 10 or 15 miles a day. It just didn’t work. And they’re so much more of a pain, ‘cause you’ve gotta deal with ‘em all summer. It was fun when I was a kid, but when I actually got serious about it, it wasn’t a viable thing (Bruss 2010).

Despite these technological adaptations, some trappers chose to adhere to older traditions. For example, when Jim Marchini lived at Doghead Johnson’s cabin on the Nizina River just below Dan Creek from 1968 to 1970, he still used snowshoes to walk his trapline. He was dropped off at the remote site by airplane so did not have access to a dog team or snowmachine. As he explains:

It was just strictly snowshoes and pullin’ a sled with a belly band from a mule around my waist. That restricted how far I could get in a day. I didn’t make it back to the cabin very much at all. I was gone for days and days on end. How long depended on where I was going and what I was doing (Marchini 2010).

While the airplane became a main form of transportation in the region for hunting, recreation, mail delivery, and travel, it is less common in trapping. Trapping depends upon being on the ground observing the animals and their tracks, and it is hard to see these things from a thousand feet in the air. However, flying has been a reasonable method for accessing a remote trapline located someplace other than your immediate home region. For example, some trappers fly into a remote lake or campsite and make it their base of operation for the season, assuming they can get a snowmachine in or are willing to walk, snowshoe, or ski the trapline. The airplane is their way of getting there, but is not what they use to go check their traps.

It might seem difficult to understand why one would check a trapline using an airplane, but often people traveling to Cordova, Chitina, and McCarthy on a weekly or even biweekly basis for business reasons stop in isolated places to check traplines, cabins, and property and to hunt small game and fowl. In this way trapping is undertaken at Hanagita Lake and Tebay Lakes. Trapping is also reported along the southwestern flanks of the Wrangells, especially along the rivers flowing out of the Wrangells (Reckord 1983a:240).

With the passage of ANILCA in 1980 and the subsequent adoption of federal regulations for Alaska national parks, the use of aircraft to access lands designated as national park for the purposes of harvesting fish or wildlife for subsistence was prohibited except for cases when no reasonable alternative exists (36 Code of Federal Regulations 13.450). In the case of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, there is specific exemption allowing residents of Yakutat to use aircraft to access the Malaspina Forelands (36 CFR 13.1902(c)); however, a few subsistence trappers in other parts of the park received similar exemptions during the 1980s. In 1982, trapper Tom Sperstad was issued a permit by the NPS to land an airplane on a lake inside the park to access his trapline just outside the boundary where it was too dangerous to land, and in 1987 trapper Kelly Bay was issued a similar exemption to land his airplane at Lake Louise to access his trapline with a snowmachine because of his dependence on the resource and the difficulty of surface access from his home in McCarthy during the trapping season (Bleakley 2002:107). In contrast, Gary Green, who used an airplane to access trapping areas in the 1970s, stopped doing it:

When I was trapping by plane I stopped doing that after a few years because it was just more work and costly. I guess you can't fly out and land in the Park and go trapping now and I did have several spots that would be affected by that. I decided that trapping was the fun activity in itself and I didn't need to use a Super Cub to do it (G. Green 2016).

Nowadays, automobiles and trucks are one of the best ways to travel around the region and are therefore relied upon by trappers as well. They drive to a trailhead where they either take a walk out along a short trapline or launch their snowmachine for longer trips. According to ADFG data from their 2015 trappers questionnaire, 51 percent of access for trapping in their Region IV, which includes around Glennallen and eastwards into Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, was by highway vehicle, and 34 percent was by snowmachine (Parr 2016:12).

Another key element of the trapper's toolkit is a sled. In the days of walking, a trapper pulled a small wooden sled on which to carry the catch. With dog teams, a basket sled made of birch wood was preferred. Some of these sleds measured as much as twelve feet long, so could carry many supplies and furs, thereby making for a heavy load. These sleds continue to be used with snowmachines, as well as a flatter sled that works better for carrying a more freight-like load, or a commercially produced

fiberglass sled with rounded sides. In the late 1910s and early 1920s, Nelson McCrary used a unique freight sled that was originally designed, constructed and used by his father, John McCrary, a seasoned traveler who knew what was needed to make winter trail life in interior Alaska more comfortable.

The sled was covered over with canvas and a big window in front with two holes cut through the lower part of the sash for lines to run through. There was a good wood-burning stove bolted to the floor in one corner and a spring bed along the end. It really was a Deluxe outfit for traveling in the cold weather. With the coffee pot and the radio tuned to a good station, there was nothing more to be desired (McCrary 1998:17).

John McCrary used two draft horses to pull this covered sled to deliver mail between Chitina and Gulkana in the 1920s. "The U.S. Mail must be delivered, and for that purpose Dad used the 'hay burner'... It may have looked strange, but it was solid comfort compared with dog-sled travel" (McCrary 1947a:10). While Nelson did not use this large sled on a trapline trail, he did travel around the countryside in it and used it to resupply his trapping cabins.

TRAPPING IN THE PARK AND PRESERVE

Well into the 1970s, trapping was still a common activity for Native and non-Native residents in the Wrangell-St. Elias area (Reckord 1983a). It was considered a basic part of the seasonal round of subsistence in coordination with hunting, fishing, berry picking, and plant gathering. People trapped out of McCarthy, Dan Creek, May Creek, Copper Center, Chistochina, Mentasta, Gakona, Gulkana, Slana, Nabesna, and along the McCarthy Road from Chitina, Strelna and Long Lake. Like with other subsistence activities and commercial guiding, locals feared establishment of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve would shut down their trapping practices and access. For example, one of the serious trappers in Chistochina in the late 1970s withdrew from trapping across the Copper River on land he had used for twenty-five years that in 1971 was set aside under Section 17(d)(2) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) for review as possible federal conservation units. These areas are often referred to as (d)(2) lands. ANILCA created new national parks, preserves, monuments, and wildlife refuges based on these (d)(2) land recommendations. Reckord describes this trapper's concern as follows:

He feared at the time that when trapping was "closed down" in the proposed park, he would be left without an area. When the Chistochina opened up, he jumped at the chance of establishing trapping rights off the (d)(2) lands. He said that his position across the river was quickly taken over by someone else (Ibid:261).

Trapping was allowed to continue after establishment of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. In the national preserve, anyone eligible to hunt or trap under State of Alaska regulations can do so, and local rural residents can hunt and trap under federal subsistence regulations. In the national park, only NPS qualified local rural residents (those living in officially designated resident zone communities, living within the park boundaries, or living in a rural community with a permit issued under 36 CFR 13.440) can hunt and trap and only under federal subsistence regulations.¹⁰ The Alaska Department of Fish and Game manages trapping statewide by monitoring furbearer populations and conducting trapper surveys to ensure that the animal populations stay healthy and can continue to sustain trapping seasons.¹¹ In the past, NPS has done biological studies of wolf, wolverine, lynx and hare populations in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park in order to determine population numbers, estimate sustainable harvests, and ensure trapping levels were not negatively impacting species (Bleakley 2002:286-289).

Those who trapped in the area before establishment of the park have had to adapt to the changes this new land management structure brought. The switch to park management and the restrictions or changes that came along with that have not always been popular among local users. They have not appreciated their activities being regulated, controlled, or in some cases restricted. According to Dean Wilson Sr., “There’s people in the trapping world that don’t think well of the Park Service” (Wilson and Wilson 2010). Before the park was established, there was a freedom in trapping and exploring the wild country of the Copper, Chitina, Nizina, White and Nabesna River valleys. As Dean Wilson Sr. explained:

You have to understand, I came up during a period of time when (d)(2) and the land bill was not even talked about. I come up during the sixties when the question was, “Can you access that area?” It wasn’t, “Is that private land up there?” If no one lived there, and you wanted to go there, you went. If there was someone livin’ there, you checked it out first. You found out what their name was. I can truthfully say we never considered land ownership (Wilson 2010).

Some of the trapping areas still used that fall within the boundaries of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve include the old Bremner Trail, the upper Chitina and Nizina Rivers, Dan and May Creeks, Hanagita Lake, Lakina River, Long Lake, Copper River, Suslota Trail, and around Slana. The Jalamund Lake area is also used for trapping, but it lies within the Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge just outside the boundary of the Preserve. Brad Gavitt, who traps out of Slana and had only been trapping for about four years when interviewed in 2010, appreciated the opportunity to be able to trap within the Park boundaries because “there’s not a lot to do in Slana in the wintertime and it does get us outdoors and out in the Park and enjoying that. Especially during the dark time of the year, it’s somethin’ to look forward to every day. And it’s just therapeutic, I think, in a lotta ways” (Gavitt 2010).

While there may be fewer trappers in the Wrangell-St. Elias area today than there were fifty to one hundred years ago, due to the shifting economics of fur sales, the changing population, and difference in the availability of alternative local employment, some people continue to trap. One is Norwegian Tor Holmboe who came to Alaska in 1954 and lived in Slana and on the Tok Cut-Off Highway for many years.¹² Tor explains why he continued to trap:

The biggest value of an outdoor lifestyle is therapeutic. With a trapline no longer than we had (40 or 50 miles), the best we could do was break even, but that was OK with us. We lived very comfortably in the wintertime. We did what we wanted to do. Most of all, we enjoyed a very healthy lifestyle, without any stress. We weren’t hung up on “hurry to do this, hurry to do that” (Tor Holmboe quoted in Zarnke 2013:95).

Regardless of ethnicity or whether someone is a recreational or serious trapper for whom it is a main part of their livelihood, there are some basic commonalities among modern trappers. They all talk about the ethics of trapping, selection of trapping areas, access to traplines, furbearer management, and changes in trapping regulations. They stress the importance of sustainable, healthy animal populations, trapline cabins, and passing on knowledge and traditions within the trapping community. Many of these rules governing appropriate conduct are unwritten, but are known by all and are binding none the less.

Trappers in Alaska today are required to get a state-issued trapping license and should have permission to use a trapline if it is one that already exists or crosses private land. Anyone is free to access public land for trapping, as long as you are not violating other rules. The price of a trapping

license depends upon whether you are a resident of Alaska and your financial status.¹³ The official opening and closing dates of trapping seasons around the state are set by the Alaska Board of Game in keeping with their constitutional mandate for sustained yield and the Federal Subsistence Board who adheres to management principles and conservation of healthy populations as laid out in ANILCA. However, the amount and timing of snowfall are factors in the date you start trapping and how successful you might be. It is hard to trap when there is no snow, because you cannot see the animal tracks. Tracks and clues left behind by animals, such as scat, signs of feeding, and shelters, are used to figure out where the animals are and what they are doing that particular year. When to start trapping is also determined by when the trapper considers the fur of a species to be in its prime. This can vary from year to year, and is especially impacted by seasonal timing of temperatures and food availability resulting from a changing climate. For instance, Bruce James of Chokosna commented, “Last year, we learned a little bit more and the first lynx we caught wasn’t prime yet. So that tells us that while the season may be open, we really don’t need to be out there targeting them. Maybe some other critters are prime at that time” (James 2010).

Some personal choices are made within the overall seasonal timeframe. For instance, Slana trapper Brad Gavitt mentions stopping fox trapping once their mating season starts because he does not like the idea of bothering the animals during this time, plus “we like to have foxes around” (Gavitt 2010). The strong musk scent that some male furbearers develop when they are in rut also can be a deterrent to trapping them during mating season. This was certainly true for muskrat whose meat during mating season “developed a musty flavor and was relegated for use as dog food” (Haynes and Simeone 2007:37). Therefore, when upper Tanana trappers harvested muskrat as a food source, it was done in the early spring before their mating season (Ibid). Even if taking muskrat just for their pelts, spring is when most of the trapping occurred. This was when the muskrat were more active, were emerging from their submerged homes and tunnels, and the lakes were beginning to melt so it was easier to retrieve them.

There also are definitive ethical standards associated with trapping that are recommended and encouraged. These include checking your traps regularly so that any animal caught will not suffer or escape, and so that carnivores will not eat the catch. For example, Slim Williams had the situation once where he came upon wolves and had to rush to get to the two red foxes caught in traps before the wolves got to them (Gallaher and Gallaher 2004:102-103). As Dean Wilson Sr. has said:

One of my goals in trapping was to be an example of good ethics. ...One of the worst things we can have in the trapping community is a bad image in the public eye. ...Ethics are grounded in the culture of the trapping community. I’m glad for that. I think we have to keep on getting the word out, and keep educating the new trappers that are coming into the fraternity (Dean Wilson Sr. quoted in Zarnke 2013:109).

In this regard, in 1991 the Alaska Trappers Association and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game jointly created the Alaska Trappers Manual and established a Code of Ethics for trappers to follow (Alaska Trappers Association and Alaska Department of Fish and Game 1991). With some updating of language to meet modern conventions, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has this Code of Ethics posted as “A Trapper’s Responsibility” on their informational website about statewide trapping rules and regulations and on the back of the current year’s regulation booklet in hopes of educating new trappers:

1. Respect the other trapper’s “grounds” – particularly brushed, maintained traplines with a history of use.
2. Check traps regularly.

3. Promote trapping methods that will reduce the possibility of catching nontarget animals.
4. Obtain landowners' permission before trapping on private property.
5. Know and use proper releasing and killing methods.
6. Develop set location methods to prevent losses.
7. Trap in the most humane way possible.
8. Dispose of animal carcasses properly.
9. Concentrate trapping in areas where animals are overabundant for the supporting habitat.
10. Promptly report the presence of diseased animals to wildlife authorities.
11. Assist landowners who are having problems with predators and other furbearers that have become a nuisance.
12. Support and help train new trappers in trapping ethics, methods and means, conservation, fur handling, and marketing.
13. Obey all trapping regulations, and support strict enforcement by reporting violations.
14. Support and promote sound furbearer management (ADFG 2016c).

TRAPLINE OWNERSHIP

In Alaska, ownership of traplines is governed by unwritten rules and informal agreements between trappers, rather than by formal rules and regulations established by a government agency. Trappers are looked down upon if they use an area that is not theirs or that they do not have permission to access. In most cases, a trapline is transferred from one trapper to another, often to someone in the family, a trapping partner, or to a new young trapper who has been trained and mentored by the original owner. Ownership is not as definitive as with a piece of land where a signed deed exists with the boundaries and corners marked. Ownership of a trapline is usually based on mutual understanding in sort of a gentleman's agreement among nearby trappers as to who has priority access to a particular area, and others stay away (Denner 2010; Bruss 2010). Ownership changes hands when the original trapper retires and transfers his use.

I've known of traplines that were bought and sold and there was no legal basis in doing that except the acknowledgement on both parties of the sort of the respect of being able to trap a certain area. Like the trail at Strelna there going up to Nugget Creek cabin. Before I trapped it, in the '60s and through about the mid to late '70s it was trapped by Dean Wilson and he gave it to me. That particular line was with the understanding that if any of Dean's kids grew up and wanted to trap, that I would give it back to his kids. The trapline trail was just part of the honor that is amongst the trapping community that everybody respects everybody else's area. The only time there's problems with that for the most part is when somebody new moves in and they don't have those kind of values. It's state land and I'll trap where ever I want, you know. Then that turns into a conflict sometimes. Didn't care about traditional and customary prior use or anything. Those kind generally they come and then they go. Because people that generally have that kind of attitude have problems with other areas, too, then. The best thing to do is if both of them can sit down and talk about it and sometimes when the new person realizes that's the way it's done here, they're like, "Ok, I, I just didn't know" (Bruss 2010).

Dean Wilson Sr. explains his preferred approach to resolving conflict over traplines and trapping territory:

I'm a believer [that] in disputes like that, the best way to handle it is man-to-man, eyeball-to-eyeball. Don't go up and down the road telling everybody how that dirty so-and-so, he's messin' with my trap line, you know. Don't do that. Don't go in there and grab his traps and stomp 'em or anything like that. Just leave 'em alone and all these things will pay off in the end. Walk up to the man, man-to-man, and say, "Say, let me buy you a cup of coffee over at the diner over here." Or "Stop by the house." Or "I want to talk to you about somethin'. We got somethin' we need to hash out here." And it pays off (Wilson 2010).

However, disputes over traplines have been known to get pretty heated.

If a person says, "I don't care. I got just as much right here as you do," then that ends up, more times than not, being resolved by state troopers. I've gone through that more than once. All the way to court. Usually, it doesn't just stop with that. There ends up being stealing and other stuff going on. That can get really ugly and it's too bad that it has to but there're a lot of bad things in life that shouldn't be how they and that's just one of 'em. A court can only look at things that are done actually illegally. Like say if two guys are trappin' the same place and the other guy just snaps your traps, he's in violation. That's harassment of your legal trapping activities. I couldn't tell you how many times I've had animals stolen and stuff, too. That's harder to prove, because if you don't witness it then it's hearsay (Bruss 2010).

Ralph Lohse, who is of the same generation of trapper as Dean Wilson Sr., believes that talking with another trapper you have a conflict with is the best form of dispute resolution. This is what he did when in 1968/69 when someone else set traps on his trail on the Chitina River. "We negotiated a peaceful settlement after everything cooled down from the fact that I unset his traps and that he caught my dog. We became friends and we never had any problems after we decided where we were each gonna go" (Lohse 2010). They divided up the territory so each had an area to trap that would not overlap or conflict with the other. Dean Wilson Sr. agreed that sometimes traplines would be sold, but explains that it was not a sale in the normal sense of the word and was usually only done by non-Natives:

First of all, you have to understand that the trappers have their own method. It's not recognized by the state or the federal government or anyone else. Trappers would sell a trapline sometimes and when it was sold, it was sold. I mean, it was gone. Once you sold it, it was gone forever and so it wasn't sold very often. Usually, if it was sold [it was] when a guy moved out of the area and he wasn't gonna be comin' back. Usually sold it as the last ditch effort to obtain a little bit of capital to move on [with]. Generally, Natives were not prone to sell any trapline, cabins or anything like that. They tended to hang on to the property and traplines, etc. White people were more inclined to sell traps and that. Traplines were usually sold based on, on the value of them was determined by the amount of fur that had been taken off of that trapline. Usually, it was one, two, three years catch and then the value of the improvements. Maybe they put a new roof on a cabin or roof on a shed (Wilson 2010).

Sometimes a trapline is taken over when it is clear that a trail has not been kept clear, cabins are in disrepair and the route has been abandoned. "If a trapline has a known history of use and that person hasn't trapped it in three years it's generally considered abandoned. That's kind of a local custom and that's developed by the Alaska Trapper's Association that after three years of non-use that trail is abandoned and open" (Bruss 2010). "Prior to that, it's just good management to let it lay fallow for a year or two" (Wilson 2010). Dean Wilson Jr. emphasized that if you want to keep anybody else from taking your trapline you have to be an active trapper, consistently be trapping:

It's important to kinda keep active, keep the line open. And the other thing I think it is important that even if you're not gonna trap for a year, you can put some sets out that are just to let people know you're still using the area. Even put a sign out there to say I'm still trappin' this line. Just show a presence out there. I think that's important. When you don't do those things, that's where controversy always falls (Wilson and Wilson 2010).

In popular trapping areas or when fur prices are high, a rumored abandonment can lead to a rush from other trappers, with the first to arrive and set his traps being the one to claim the new ownership. In some places, there are few opportunities for new trappers to gain a foothold, thus making abandonments or retirements or partnerships with existing trappers the only options, some of which can mean years of waiting.

Dean Wilson Jr. offers another method for protecting your trapline, albeit not necessarily the best choice for everyone. That is to choose a difficult location that not everyone would have the skills to manage. Somebody is less likely to steal your line if it is a dangerous route.

Klutina River's not a good one for running. I don't think I have to worry about anybody taking that section away from me any time soon. It's just not a good river. It's really straight. It's deep, it's fast, and I wait till it's pretty secure before I jump on it. It's like the Copper [River]. Dave [Bruss] and my dad ran the Copper for years downriver. You never have to worry about nobody takin' those lines away from ya. You have to know what you're doing. You gotta overcome some fears and you gotta have some years behind ya knowin' how to stay above the ice, you know (Wilson and Wilson 2010).

The other problem current trappers in the Copper River valley have experienced regarding trapline ownership and usage is other people setting traps on their trails. This goes against the customs and traditions of proper behavior among "professional" level trappers, especially strong in the Copper River valley, where you are supposed to respect each other's trails and traplines. However, this practice is not always followed by everybody that comes into the area, whether a new inexperienced resident trying their hand at trapping, or someone passing through and stealing from traps that are now easily accessible from the numerous roadways criss-crossing the region. And the problems could increase as the population grows. "We never ever have suspected any locals for stealing fur out of the traps, but, as you have more people running in and out on snowmachines and four-wheelers, and cars not everybody's gonna respect the same thing. You're going to have more of that as you get a bigger population" (Lohse 2010). It is believed that the local people who trap on a regular basis adhere pretty well to the shared understanding about the customs and traditions of respectful trapping (Ibid).

Despite periodic conflicts over traplines and the potential for limited animals to be harvested, most trappers love the lifestyle and are happy to share their passion with a newcomer who shows a committed interest. "I wouldn't want to live here without trapping either" (Ibid). Or as Dean Wilson Jr. explains:

This is a big country out here and even though some people think that a lot of the land is taken up, you know, if somebody is willin' to do the work, and they get out and open some [trap] line up, they can always find places to trap. You know, trapping's a lot of work, too. Just itself is a lot of work so if you get somebody that really, really, really wants to trap real bad that's kinda an honorable goal to have. So you don't want to discourage that either. So there are some places around where we've put other people. ...We just encourage them to get on certain areas and they get out there, and they do their own trail opening. Then they also feel better about it, too, if they can find these areas and build their own short trails here and there and them and their kids can get out there and trap them. Not have to worry about anybody else. And then at that point, if somebody else moves into their line, then they kinda have a little ownership there as well, too (Wilson and Wilson 2010).

Where a trapline is set also is based on animal availability. Depending upon what species you are targeting, you put traps in different areas according to the animal's preferred habitat and their behavior. For example, a marten set is put up a tree, while a muskrat set is put among the lakes and ponds that you have confirmed through observation have muskrat living in or near them. Furbearer management is also taken into consideration when establishing a trapline. "If you want to have any kinda fur management it doesn't work to have two people trapping the same line. It just always defaults into each guy trying to catch every last thing, 'cause if I don't get it, he's gonna get it kind of mentality" (Bruss 2010).

Another idea for trapline management is to have registered traplines as a way to protect trapline ownership and ensure accurate harvest data is collected. But this has been controversial. As Dean Wilson Jr. discussed in 2010, there are pros and cons to this approach:

By and large, I would say most people are against it. But there are some big plusses to it as far as management would go. Personally, the areas where I'm at, it would be nice to have something like that but the biggest downside to registered trap lines is government oversight. That's what always worries people. And it would be a two-fold government oversight. One is, you have to have the government involved somehow to insure that you're actually even trapping the line. But the other side is, you wouldn't want the government so involved in it that they're dictating your trapping, how you're gonna trap, how many animals you're taking every year, and what you're gonna take. If you don't meet this quota, then you have to get moved off of there. So it's really a fine line that gets played there. Canada seems to do pretty good with it. But it's not an easy field to get into because some people, hard as they trap, they flat won't be able to meet some of these quotas. Just because they don't pay good enough attention to detail or they don't have the experience or whatever. It would be a tough show for Alaska to get into it, but I have a feeling eventually that probably the federal lands are gonna be the first to get into it only because of that (Wilson and Wilson 2010).

Typical of the desire for an unencumbered life free from government control that is held by most long-time Wrangell-St. Elias area residents, trappers prefer to deal with trapline ownership and use issues among themselves. As Brad Gavitt states, "We don't register trap lines here. And I think that's fine. A lotta times, the regulations just don't help. It just hinders. I think, with trapping it's got to be self-regulated" (Gavitt 2010). In comparison, Steve Hobbs who also traps out of Slana has thought that registered traplines for serious trappers might be a good idea as a way to avoid the problem he has run into where he might want to lay off trapping an area for a year or two so the furbearer

populations can rebound, but he is afraid of losing his trail to newcomers who think it has been abandoned. To avoid this situation, he will still put out a few traps to make it look used. He thinks that having a trapline defined through registration would protect his continued access where he would “not have to worry about someone else comin’ in” (Hobbs 2010).

LEARNING TO TRAP

As with other subsistence pursuits, to become a successful trapper it is best to learn from others who have done it before. In the Native tradition, you learn from your elders. For hunting and trapping, it would be from a grandfather, father, or uncle. For women’s activities, like berry picking, food preparation, or child rearing, you would watch and learn from your grandmother, mother or aunt. For the Ahtna people, trapping was not only a male pursuit. Traditionally, many women had short traplines close to their homes for snaring rabbits or other small game, or would join in spring muskrat hunting. The complexity of knowledge required to sustain this land-based lifestyle was passed between generations. Respecting the past and passing down knowledge from the “old-timers” to the younger generation also is a key part of the non-Native trapping tradition in the Wrangell-St. Elias area. Lavell and Dean Wilson Sr. both learned to trap from their father while growing up in Northway, and now Dean Wilson Jr. continues the family tradition. As he says, “There’s quite a learning curve with trapping. It’s not like you can just show up and start settin’ out traps. It does take several years to learn” (Wilson and Wilson 2010).

Many who came to the Wrangell-St. Elias area had trapped small animals when they were youngsters growing up in the Lower 48 in places like Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Montana, so they had some basic knowledge of trapping. Or they had read books, manuals (including the *Alaska Trappers Manual*), and hunting and trapping magazines on how to trap. As McCarthy resident and construction company owner, Keith Rowland, said, “I learned about trapping mostly through books and through trial and error” (quoted in Brown and Gates 2012:148). However, this did not mean they had knowledge of the specialized conditions of trapping wolves, wolverines, lynx, beaver, marten, mink, fox, or coyote in Alaska or the Wrangell-St. Elias region. This is where learning from locals was critical. Ralph Lohse points out that older trappers who may no longer be trapping as much as they used to are more willing to share with young guys than if it was between two young men competing for the same area and animals. “He’s not a threat and besides it might even be fun to show him what to do” (Lohse 2010).

In 2007, Bruce James was one of these newcomers attracted to the idea of trapping, albeit for recreational purposes. Knowing that he lacked experience, he was careful to consult with locals about how to trap and about areas where he could trap. He did not want to intrude on someone else’s trapline. Although Bruce had some previous trapping experience when a high school student in Michigan, had done a lot of reading, and learned through trial and error with a lot of pinched fingers and cold hands, he was still considered a beginner in need of training. Bruce ended up being mentored by his neighbor, Jack Smith, a long time Chokosna resident and trapper. In 2010, after two winters of trapping, Bruce was running three trapping circuits from his home, each being about three miles, that he covered by snowshoe as a day trip. Given that his trails radiate from his home, and some points cross private land, he has made sure to have permission from this landowner, and he has a large buffer of $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from other trails and the road in order to avoid potential conflicts with other users.

Dean Wilson Sr. has been trapping in the Wrangell-St. Elias area for a long time and has been a mentor to many newer trappers including his son, Dean Wilson Jr., and Dave Bruss. Dave lived in Kenny Lake starting in 1967, has lived in Tonsina since 1971, and has been trapping since around 1973. He did some trapping on his own in high school and learned by trial and error, but really credits Dean for teaching him, especially with “things like ethics and fur handling. Especially fur handling,



Dean Wilson Sr. and Barbara Cellarius (Cultural Anthropologist for Wrangell-St. Elias National Park) during an oral history interview at his home near Kenny Lake, 2010. Courtesy of National Park Service.

tryin' to learn that kinda stuff on your own, you're starting with no clue and that just doesn't work. You have to have some idea on what you're supposed to be doin'" (Bruss 2010).

Dean Wilson Sr. was born in 1941 and grew up in Northway, Alaska where his father ran a trading post. Life was challenging, and making a living off the land was key to survival. He started trapping when he was around seven years old, inheriting the love of the outdoors from his father, and because "all the Indian people at the village were trappers and if you wanted to be part of the group, you were a trapper" (Wilson 2010). Dean learned to trap from his father, who trapped with Oscar Albert in the Black Hills and the Ladue River, but his biggest mentors were the elder Native trappers who had spent much of their lives on the trail and in the woods tracking and seeing animals. Dean developed intense observational skills, a keen sense of how and where to best set a trap for a particular animal, and the deep respect for wildlife and nature present within Native traditions. He trapped around Northway, up the Tok River, in the Mentasta Mountains, and in 1965 moved to Kenny Lake where he trapped the Tonsina River Valley, the Chitina River Valley, the Copper River Basin down as far as the Tiekel, the Chitina River as far up as the mouth of the Lakina, the Strelna Trail, and up the Klutina River. When he was running all his trails, usually for about six to eight weeks of the year, it would cover about 300 miles (Wilson 2010). While Dean mostly trapped on his own, some years he would have a partner, including Jonathan Billum from Chitina, Dave Bruss, Joe Roche, or Steve Helkenn. Dean Wilson Sr. became known around the region for his trapping success. Eventually, he stopped trapping, became a fur buyer, and ran his own business, Klondike Alaska Furs, for about twenty-five years.

My father bought furs at this trading post, [so] I had a basic understanding of quality of furs and marketing basics. Other local trappers would ask me where I was selling

furs, what price I was getting. At that time, I was doing a little better than what they were able to do selling to the local furbuyers. Some of them asked me to include their furs with mine. This went on for a couple of years and then some of the guys were saying I should just buy the furs from them and then sell them for whatever I could get. I started doing that for them, and from there it just evolved! I never intended to buy fur, it wasn't my goal, but I finally started to do more and more of it (Dean Wilson Sr. quoted in Zarnke 2013:108).

Although Dean Wilson Sr. switched from trapping to fur buying, he continued to pass on his trapping knowledge and ethics and understanding of the local environment and animal populations to other local trappers, including teaching a beginning trapping course (Wilson and Wilson 2010).

Having learned to trap when he was about eight years old, Dean Wilson Jr. now is also passing down the family trapping tradition to his own children with hopes that one day one of his children will take over the traplines like he did from his father. He also finds trapping to be an excellent way to get his children outside and excited about the natural world.

My oldest son, he's 13. He can read animal sign like you wouldn't believe. He can just walk around and start pointing out things. He picks up on things just like that. That's [from] years of hangin' out and really payin' attention to detail. I got the kids a snowmachine, and durin' trappin' season we can hardly keep them indoors anymore. They enjoy getting' out and they're runnin' around on that little snowmachine everywhere. They'd check traps every day if it was up to them. You say, "No, you gotta let 'er go for four or five days, alright?" They're just going after squirrels a lot of times. But squirrel trapping is a lot of fun for kids. They get a dollar each when the fur buyer comes through. And if they get some marten and they get lynx, it is a lot of fun for them. They really enjoy it and it gets them outdoors. It's hard work, you know. When it's 15 below out, it's not easy to get a kid to go outside and it's easy just to say, "Ok, I'll just kinda hunker down here." But, no, not them, they're dressin' up and they're heading outdoors and even if it's pitch black out. It teaches some character, too. There is a lot to be said about getting kids out at a young age. It really prepares them, I think, for a lotta things (Wilson and Wilson 2010).

Similar to his younger brother, Dean, Lavell Wilson took to trapping as part of his lifestyle. He also worked in the construction business, was a pilot and hunting guide, and served one term in the House of Representatives of the Alaska State Legislature. Lavell was born in Oregon in 1937 and as a boy came with his family to Alaska in 1948 to meet up with his father who was living and working in Northway. He first went out trapping with his father when he was about eleven or twelve years old. When he was young, Lavell went out trapping on snowshoes, but eventually he gave in to modern technology. He remembers buying his first snowmachine in Tok:

Couldn't really afford it so went half with another guy, and then we liked it so much bought him out. They were just a lot better than walking. It's kind of like this country before airplanes. The airplane come along and look what it did, you know. And look what the snowmachine did. It revolutionized trapping (Wilson 2013).

In comparison to his brother who made trapping the main focus of his life, Lavell mixed in wage paying jobs to help pay the bills and support his family. He settled in Tok, but continued to trap as long as his age and health allowed just because he enjoyed it, and encourages his son to follow in his footsteps.

LIVING THE TRAPPING LIFESTYLE

In keeping with the tradition of his predecessors, when Gary Green came to the Nizina River Valley and McCarthy in 1973, he took to trapping in the wintertime. He trapped from about 1978 until 1988 when he started McCarthy Air and no longer had time. In a 2016 oral history interview, Gary describes his early days of trapping:

I ran a trapline in several directions back in the late '70s, and after Les Heglund was killed, I ended up inheriting or taking over all of his traplines.¹⁴ That meant from McCarthy every direction that you could travel: up McCarthy Creek; down the Kennicott [River]; back down to McCarthy Road which had no one living on it; up the glacier; and out the Nizina [River]. They were all my traplines and it was a fun activity. Again, it is like hunting or prospecting. It makes you go out on days that you wouldn't normally go out on or go further than you normally would go and you are out there. When you are out in the backcountry, you are on an adventure and you never know what you will run into or what kind of excitement you will have that day, but trapping is exciting and fun and I was making part of my living off doing that. And now I sit here and think every direction that I went in I can't go now because it is too active. Well, it is not because it is a park, but there are all these trails. When I would travel, it would be seldom that someone else would be on my trail before me. Some never were traveled, but now every one of those routes would have activity on it and if you are a trapper, you need to travel a trail first. After fresh snows, you want to travel it first so that you see what animal tracks are crossing the trail or going down the trail and when it is too busy, you can't see all that stuff.

This is not overly dense country. To be a trapper in Alaska you got to cover a lot of miles. I went in so many different directions, but I don't think I ever went even 20 miles in any direction. I followed most existing routes, either a road, an old mining road or the river courses. I would trap up the Kennicott Glacier on the west side and that was a snowshoe route because it wasn't even good skiing for the most part through the woods and up hills. If you are traveling in the winter in all kinds of weather if you go 15 miles out and 15 miles back, 30 miles of backcountry travel in a day that is enough for a day. By the time you get back to the cabin, that warm fire and something hot to drink sounds pretty good. I was traveling by snowmachine, airplane, skiing, snowshoeing, and a little bit by dog team. I never owned my own dog team so I didn't trap much with them, but I would fly out with the Super Cub and land in a different valley and then either put on snowshoes and snowshoe a couple miles and set traps or cross-country ski trapping. So I did all those methods and again, that is part of the interest of being in the backcountry is I got to cover a lot of country (G. Green 2016).

The species Gary Green caught the most of was marten, followed by lynx, wolverine, wolf, coyote, and fox. "I did a little bit of beaver trapping, but I didn't end up doing that much of that. Never was a muskrat trapper, and I didn't catch that many wolverine, but they are good money and caught a few wolves too" (Ibid). Clearly, the price for fur was a factor in Green's trapping. "Marten and lynx were good money. But, the price for furs it varies. It fluctuates quite a lot. But during some of the years I was trapping it was quite high" (Ibid).

Part of being a trapper is being a good winter traveler. You have to understand the environment in which you are living and traveling, be a good observer, and be prepared for all possibilities. Gary Green explains some of the conditions he was faced with:

We had a lot of cold conditions and the rivers would freeze up. You could cross the Nizina River every year by Thanksgiving. Nowadays, it doesn't seem to necessarily be crossable until the first of the year and it varies from year to year, but there are a lot of years it is late. There are always open channels on the rivers when you are traveling that you got to watch for, but if you're experienced at all, you don't travel too fast. You can see them coming and usually you can find a way around them. It is when you can't find a way around them that that is how far you go that day and you come back. One of my activities that I always enjoyed was going and checking like either McCarthy Creek or the Nizina River to see when it was frozen up enough to where I could be the first one across for the season. And sometimes I would have to drive 10 miles or snowmachine out 10 miles to the Nizina River four or five times just watching it freeze and the next time go all the way (Ibid).

Gary thrived on this excitement, adventure and challenge, so was never swayed by the dangers of trapping and being out on the trail in the winter. He enjoyed the peace and quiet. He reveled in the beauty and solitude. He liked trying to figure out the animal tracks and testing his skills. There was the thrill of finding an animal in your trap or snare when you went back to check. Or as Dean Wilson Sr. points out:

At 40 below, you tend to hole up and to stay at home. For one thing, your animal movements are very poor when temperatures are, are severe. And when you have very low, low animal movement, you have very low catch. So it isn't worthwhile to get out there and break trail and [be] going after just a very few animals that move around. So you tend to hole up just like the animals do. [There are] always chores. Always somethin' that you need to be doing around the camp. So you tend to stay home and keep on top of those things for a few days at least, 'till the weather gets to you and then after a while you go, "Oh, forty-five below's not that bad. I can make it. It's just a short run." (Wilson 2010).

Fred Denner is another long-time trapper in what is now Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. He has lived at Dan Creek since 1975 and has trapped in the Nizina River, Chititu Creek, and Young Creek valleys. Fred learned from earlier McCarthy area trappers such as Al Gagnon, Tom Sperstad, and Siever Jacobson who was trapping as early as the 1930s. Fred continues to trap, choosing what species to pursue and where to set his traps depending upon fur prices and the health of various populations (Denner 2010). He is careful to rotate his trapping areas to keep from overharvesting any one area or population.

Maintaining healthy furbearer populations is critical to any trapper, since his livelihood is based upon his continued ability to catch animals. As Brad Gavitt said:

I don't trap flippantly. I have a deep respect for the animals. I think they're part of God's creation, and I believe that God put them there for our use and our benefit, but for us to manage the wildlife not to abuse it. To be thoughtful of the populations and not overdo it. I've been entrusted with something and that I need to take care of it (Gavitt 2010).

Gavitt is not alone in this belief so it is common to practice some self-imposed wildlife management techniques, such as stopping trapping if a species appears to be in decline, changing species harvested, and focusing on different locations and habitats. Similar to a farmer leaving a

field fallow for a season in order to rejuvenate the soil, this allows the furbearers to rebound or their habitat and food sources to recuperate. As Dave Bruss of Tonsina says, “I’ve taken a pretty serious approach to fur management on my own. In my areas, if the fur population doesn’t justify an all-out harvest, I’m not gonna do it even if the season is open. There’s some years I’ll let lines just kinda go dormant if the fur population doesn’t justify a full trapping effort” (Bruss 2010). Or as Dean Wilson Sr. explains:

I would trap pretty much the same area every year. Although, I was always looking for new areas, better areas. Once I got well established and felt I picked up some of the prime areas, then I took some areas that were marginal habitat where the animals were not very prolific. So I would trap that area maybe every second or third year and try to let the animals build [up] a little bit. ...It just isn’t wise to go in and harvest an area real hard when the animal population is low to begin with. This isn’t wise. You’re going to hurt yourself and hurt the animal population both (Wilson 2010).

Ralph Lohse is another long-time resident of the Copper River valley who, like Dean Wilson Sr., has made a living from trapping and mentored many a newcomer. Ralph has been trapping since he came to Alaska in 1967. He and his wife, Linda, lived at Long Lake along the McCarthy Road for a long time which was his base of operations. However, in later years, they split their time between Long Lake, Chitina, Kenny Lake, and Cordova. Ralph does not feel this moving around to be too unusual, since “if you go back into Alaskan history that was very traditional because you had fish camp in the summer time, and game camp in the fall, and winter camp in the winter time” (Lohse 2010). Originally gaining access to an old trapline used by John Wilson and Harley King, eventually Ralph expanded into areas that nobody else was trapping.

At that time there weren’t very many people up there, so there was areas that had been trapped back in the 30s and 40s and 50s, like George Schmock had trapped them and a few people like that, but they hadn’t been there for 15 years. So you opened up those kinda places, and as far as the general area was concerned you knew there was nobody else in there and the people who had been in there said that they weren’t going to be trapping, and so now you could trap it (Lohse 2010).

At the height of his trapping, Ralph ran a 100 to 150 mile trapline up the Lakina River, the Nizina Canyon, the Chakina, and the West Fork. He also trapped from Lakina to Strelna. He has used both a dog team and snowmachine to travel his route. Ralph is now in his 70s, so no longer runs these long traplines, but periodically he still will walk a short two-mile loop from his house. He enjoyed the outdoor life of trapping, the thrill of catching an animal, and relied upon the income, but just as important to him was the opportunity this lifestyle provided for him to travel through and learn the country around his Copper Valley home. It is important to him that future generations have this same opportunity and supports continued subsistence and trapping activity in and around Wrangell-St. Elias National Park.

As recently as 2012, Keith Rowland and his sons ran a trapline from their home in McCarthy. It is clearly a family operation, with Keith teaching his sons and giving them direct hands-on experience with what he first learned in books, and an activity that is given high priority in their lives.

We go out on our main trapline—about 140 miles long—one Friday morning, overnight, and then trap all day Saturday. Then we’re back for church on Sunday (K. Rowland quoted in Brown and Gates 2012:149).

The Rowlands also have shorter lines that they run from two to thirty miles long. The twelve-year-old son could check the shortest ones after school by walking, and the longer ones were monitored by the older sons or Keith on a snowmachine. The money the boys earned by trapping was put back into the operation by them purchasing their own gas for their snowmachines (Ibid). Similar to other current trappers, the Rowlands sell their furs to friends or taxidermists, or through a Canadian fur auction house.

ANTI-TRAPPING SENTIMENTS

Modern trappers are faced with opposition to the killing of animals and the wearing of fur. Trappers in some locations in the state have to deal with conflict with non-trappers, theft of traps and animals, and questions about proper marking of trapping trails (Parr 2016:47-57). Trapping continues to be an essential part of the lifestyle and key component of the identity of many Wrangell-St. Elias area residents, but all of the trappers interviewed in 2010 by WRST cultural anthropologist Barbara Cellarius talked about conflicts with recreationalists, dog mushers, and others about the presence of their traps on multi-use trails, such as the one to Klutina Lake or the Kotsina Trail. They have all dealt with traps being pulled up or animals being removed from the traps. Some trappers like Dean Wilson Jr. attribute some of these behaviors to people “not very well versed in trapping” (Wilson and Wilson 2010). However, these trappers try to avoid conflict. On popular trails, especially those used by families, they follow ethical practices for safety by setting their traps as far off the trail as possible to avoid people and dogs getting caught in traps, and put up signs indicating that it is an active trapping area so that people are aware that extra caution is needed (Gavitt 2010; Wilson and Wilson 2010). Brad Gavitt makes sure to clean up all his traps and equipment after trapping season so that any summer users of a public trail will not see any trace of his trapping (Gavitt 2010). And Dean Wilson Jr. makes sure his traps are “at least a mile away from any house that has people living in it” (Wilson and Wilson 2010).

Despite these efforts, there continues to be opposition to trapping, some of it often quite vocal or physically damaging. And there will be for the foreseeable future. As Ralph Lohse pointed out, “Things change as you get a bigger population, as you get more people living here” (Lohse 2010). The feeling among the experienced trappers in the Wrangell-St. Elias area is that bad trappers give the rest of the trapping community a bad name. They believe they typically are newcomers or people who are used to trapping in urban areas who are not fully informed about proper trapping practices and etiquette, do not follow ethical practices, or accidentally get dogs caught in sets. “That’s probably the biggest black eye that trappers get” (Wilson and Wilson 2010). However, sometimes dogs get caught in traps by accident. For example, Ralph Lohse’s trapping hot spot on Long Lake now has more people living nearby with pet dogs who have been caught. Ralph solved the problem by modifying his trapline. “It doesn’t so much change your attitudes but it changes where you can trap. The same places that are attractive to fur are attractive to people” (Lohse 2010). Overall, in response to these conflicts, the local trappers try to keep a low profile and do whatever they can to promote the benefits of trapping, educate newcomers about proper techniques, and prevent any negative encounters on the trail.

FUR FARMING

While not exactly fur trapping, raising animals for fur served a similar purpose – to meet the demands of a rising national and international market for furs, allowing sellers to earn a profit. Fur farming contrasts with trapping in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, as it was short-lived; it does not rise to the level of two generations of traditional association. Although fur farming does not perfectly fit the definition of occupational groups as required for this EO&A, it is being included because, at its peak, fur farming was an important element in the non-Native economy of the Copper River valley. The

specific lifestyle associated with fur farming influenced the social milieu of the region, so needs to be mentioned in any discussion of what life was like for residents at the time. The brief overview below also demonstrates how entwined fur farming was with trapping.

“Fur farming was the modern approach to harvesting furs – superior to trapping in the quality of the fur, the humane treatment of animals, and the conservation of wild furbearers” (Isto 2012:3). Also similar to trapping, fur farms were licensed, as well as inspected by a veterinarian (Isto 2012). Fur farming and trapping were intertwined because of the effect on the global fur market and subsequent price differential. In Canada, from 1929 to 1945, as fur farming productivity increased the raw fur output from wild furs decreased (Ray 1990:121). It is likely that the market shifted similarly in Alaska when farmed furs glutted the market and the prices paid for wild fur fell, although Alaskan fur contributed a smaller percentage to the world’s fur market than did Canada.

From 1915 to 1940, fur farming was the third largest industry in Alaska (Ibid:ix). During this period, fox farming was a thriving industry in the Copper River valley. Black, silver, and cross foxes are native to the country west of Mount Sanford and were heavily trapped, but some also were live trapped to start farmed herds. In order to care for the penned foxes, fresh food sources, such as rabbit, fish, and ptarmigan, could be locally harvested, and fresh drinking water could be collected from lakes and rivers. Short, temperate summers and long, cold winters provided the ideal conditions for foxes to develop thick, luxurious furs (US DOI NPS 2013:11). Although the natural environment of the Copper River valley produced high quality fur, fox farming in the Copper River valley remained a highly speculative endeavor (US DOI NPS 2013:4, 15) and by the 1940s saw the demise of the industry (Isto 2012).

In the late 1910s, it was considered chic for stylish women in the United States and abroad to wear fox furs, thus stimulating the fur industry in Alaska. “The price of a blue fox fur doubled from \$50.00 in 1914 to \$100.00 in 1920. These unimaginable profits set in motion the commercial raising of various species of foxes” (Ibid:11). Fur farms trying to raise not only foxes, but mink, beaver, muskrat, marten, otter, lynx, chinchillas, and raccoon cropped up all over Alaska.¹⁵ Trappers were still involved in the early formation of fur farms, as domestic herds often were started from locally live trapped animals, such as silver fox, mink, marten or beaver, that were purchased from Native or other local trappers. “Our part of the country was over run with buyers paying fabulous sums for young silver pups or grown foxes caught in the wilds” (McCrary 1947b). The purchase of breeding stock from another fur farm was another method of starting and expanding a domestic herd. “When demand for breeders was high, most of the farmer’s sales would consist of live animals, which brought far higher prices than pelts. When demand for breeders was low, all but a stable core of animals were killed for their skins (Isto 2012:2). Not only did this benefit the buyer by creating a new population, but the seller benefited from the extra income of the sale that he could put back into his own stock and operation. “We sold seven thousand dollars worth of breeding stock and were able to increase the ranch stock to twelve pairs” (McCrary 1947b:34). For raising non-native species, such as raccoon or chinchillas, original breeding stock was purchased elsewhere and shipped in, with some then sold among farms to expand the Alaska business (Isto 2012). The December 1947 issue of *The Alaska Sportsman* magazine displayed an advertisement from the Johnson Chinchilla Ranch in Sutton Alaska at Mile 62 of the Glenn Highway stating:

**RAISE REAL CHINCHILLAS
UNDER THE MIDNIGHT SUN.**

The living jewels of the fur world. Originally from South American Andes. Vegetarian, odorless, gentle, economical to raise. Pedigreed Registered stock. (Chinchillas are not rabbits.)
Begin Today—Plan Chinchilla Fur Farm—In Alaska!” (McCrary 1947b:33).

One of the first fox farms in the Copper River valley was managed by John McCrary, who began raising blue, red, and silver foxes in Copper Center in 1903. Born in Illinois in 1864, McCrary came to

Alaska in 1902 and filed a claim on a homestead adjacent to the Valdez Trail about a mile north of the Klutina River.¹⁶ Charles Heideman, the manager of the Copper Center Agricultural Experiment Station from 1907 to 1909, was intrigued with fox farming and when the Experiment Station shut down he operated a silver fox farm of his own on the Tazlina River from 1909 to 1916. He also developed a company called the Alaska Fur and Silver Fox Company, and wrote several promotional booklets to inspire others to partake in the local fox farming industry (US DOI NPS 2013:11; Isto 2012:40-42). One of his booklets reports:

Copper Center has more high prized silver fox skins than any other region of similar size in the world...enough salmon can be caught by one man in a week to feed a hundred foxes for a year...here land can be had for occupation, no rent to pay, no insurance, no taxes [and] timber for building and fuel costs nothing...there is no limit to the market...no limit to the food supply...nature does all the work...the risks are minimal and the profits phenomenal (C. Heideman 1910:17-18 cited in US DOI NPS 2013:11).

As the population grew in the Copper River valley, more fox farms were established. In 1911, Fritz Hinkle, Peter Schneider, and Gus Stein began raising foxes in Tazlina. From 1914 to 1934, Lawrence DeWitt and his wife, Belle, raised foxes at their roadhouse in Slana. In 1915, George Bull ran a silver fox farm behind Bull's Roadhouse at Mile 24.1 of the Edgerton Road. In 1923, when fox prices were on the rise, he sold the business to Tom Jennings (US DOI NPS 2013:11; Bleakley 2006: 18, 30, 53, 107, 114). Chitina storekeeper Billy Tibbs and guide Andy Taylor also were part-time fur farmers. In 1929, Nelson McCrary trapped five pairs of live beavers for Billy Tibbs who was "starting a fur ranching business" (McCrary 1998:11).

Enticed by the dream of making it rich in a booming industry, Nelson McCrary shifted from trapping to fox farming. As early as 1912, he obtained his first live fox hoping for domestication.

I purchased a good looking silver vixen from an Indian who lived near us. He had taken her alive in a trap. I paid him two hundred and fifty dollars for her. Dad and my older brother were away at the time, so I built a pen for my fox intending to keep her until they returned (McCrary 1947b:8).

In 1914, after getting married and buying the old homestead of George Rorer at Dry Creek, Nelson McCrary whole-heartedly attempted to raise silver foxes. But it did not prove a successful venture.

My younger brother, Earl, and I decided to get rich raising silver foxes. We built three pens for a starter, as we had two pairs of tame silvers and a fine looking pair of cross foxes. That spring a fur buyer offered us a thousand dollars each for the silver. Of course, with a veritable gold mine in the offing, we laughed at him.

But we did not raise any pups in that venture, and later we traded the best fox to one of our neighbors for a cow. Another we sold to C.L. Hoyt, of Gulkana, for two hundred and fifty dollars, and the rest we pelted (Ibid:8-9).

In need of money, McCrary went to work for J.E. Wilson hauling freight with a six-horse team on the newly constructed Richardson Highway and hauling ore from the Westover Mine to the railroad station at McCarthy, and then was a trainman on the Copper River and Northwestern Railway (Ibid:9). Here he met Floyd Smith, a conductor on the railroad. Equally bitten by the fox farming bug, the two men formed a partnership and settled on Wooded Island near Montague Island in Prince William Sound to raise blue foxes. "With blue foxes selling at two or three hundred dollars each and visions of riches just around the corner, Floyd and I were walking

on the clouds” (Ibid). This venture also did not prove fruitful. After a stint of working for the Kennecott Copper Corporation in LaTouche, having never lost the “dream of the fortune to be made raising blue foxes in pens,” Nelson established a blue fox farm on the Edgerton Road in 1925 (Ibid:34) .

I figured I’d need a location where I could keep a few milk cows to furnish milk for the fox pups, and I knew just the spot—on the highway at Mile 33, out of Chitina.

Dad had wintered a herd of cattle there, and I knew there was plenty of wild hay to cut for feed. There was a lake with a nice south slope along its shore—an ideal location for fox pens (Ibid).

Finally, it looked like McCrary was going to succeed at fox farming. Mostly, he was raising and selling live animals as breeding stock and only pelting a few to sell for furs. Unfortunately, after five years the foxes produced no pups and because he was in so much debt he was forced to shut down. In 1930, he moved the family to Cordova where he worked as a fire chief and police chief. Still in love with the notion of fur farming, while in Cordova, McCrary raised nutria for a few years. “They were gentle and easy to raise. They’d eat anything from coffee grounds to banana peelings. They were so homely they were fascinating” (Ibid). Although, Nelson McCrary never made the fortune he was hoping for with fox farming, he kept trying. Even in 1947, he was still dreaming of his next project, “I’ll build a muskrat and beaver farm. Oh, yes, I’ll probably have a few minks and martens on the side to use up the meat from the muskrats and beavers” (Ibid:34-35).

“By the 1920’s, fox farms were increasingly common in the Copper River Valley [sic], with farmers generally raising between 20 to 30 native blue and silver foxes in Chitina, Copper Center, Gulkana, Tazlina, and Lower Tonsina” (US DOI NPS 2013:4). Although by the mid-1920s, the fur prices began to drop. By 1929, there were fewer people raising foxes in the Copper River valley.

The largest fox farm was operated by a renown [sic] businessman, William Tibbs, who raised over 180 foxes outside Chitina. John McCrary and his son, Nelson, continued to raise foxes in Copper Center. J.B. Pippin was raising foxes in Tazlina, and Hazel Waechter, Edward Tekatch, George Bellefontaine, and Clyde Williams had opened fox farms near Gakona. Women were also involved in the local fox farming industry. In 1925, Nellie Lampson opened a fox farm of her own behind the Lower Tonsina Roadhouse. By 1928, she established a herd of 45 foxes and continued to harvest them until her death in 1933 (US DOI NPS 2013:11-12).

After finding success with fox farming, some farmers felt confident in their ability to raise other profitable fur-bearing species.

In 1928, at least four farmers were raising muskrat or mink in the Copper River Valley [sic]. Frank Bingham raised muskrats and beavers behind the Willow Creek Roadhouse off Mile 90.9 of the Valdez Trail. Amos Fleury and Fred Schneck were raising mink in Chitina and William Tibbs shifted his interest from raising foxes to harvesting mink. Nelson McCrary was breeding nutria, a South American rodent larger than a muskrat, in Copper Center (Ibid:12).

By the early 1930s, with the onset of the Depression, the price and demand for furs had dropped drastically. Unable to make a profit, “many hopeless farmers pelted their herd and abandoned fox farming to pursue other ventures (Ibid).

The historic features at the Sanford River Fox Farm, located just north of the Sanford River, are the only surviving remains of a fox farm in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. The farm was managed by licensed fox farmers, George “Frenchy” Bellefontaine, and his partner Clyde “Slim” Williams. Bellefontaine was born in 1882 in Nova Scotia, Canada, and came to Alaska in 1906 in search of adventure. He settled in the Copper River valley where he worked as a trapper, timberman and prospector. As news spread about the possible fortune to be made in fox farming, it seemed like a fabulous opportunity to someone like George who was always looking for a way to strike it rich. “He began squatting on a piece of land in the shadow of Mount Sanford in 1922 and opened the Sanford River Fox Farm” (Ibid:55). Slim Williams had built a cabin on the Copper River at the mouth of the Sanford River, and so was a neighbor to the newly established Sanford River Fox Farm. Slim helped George clear a trail from the Copper River to the site and brought in supplies to build a cabin, fence, cache, and fox pens. By 1922, they were in business and raising silver, red, and blue foxes. Williams left the business in 1926 after marrying Aileen Gallaher, and moving to Caribou Creek and the Gulkana River to run traplines (Gallaher and Gallaher 2004; US DOI NPS 2013:55-56). Bellefontaine continued to manage the farm until the economic depression of the 1930s hit the fox farming industry. “The majority of George’s livelihood depended on the single transaction he would make with Mr. Miller [the fur dealer in Gulkana]. If he did not agree with his offer, his second option was to walk 17 miles to a trading post in Gakona” (Ibid:56). He pelted his herd in the winter of 1934 and closed the farm for good in 1935 (Ibid:4).¹⁷

The Copper River valley was not the only place with fox farms in the Wrangell-St. Elias area. Starting in 1921, Hardy Trefzger raised blue foxes on Krivoi Island near Yakutat for a few years and then took over for Harry Dugdell on Knight Island (Trefzger 1963:89-94). In 1936, Trefzger stopped fox farming after “the price of blue fox pelts dropped to fifteen and eighteen dollars apiece” (Ibid:96).

THE FUTURE OF TRAPPING

The reliance on fur for income, whether from farming or trapping, has always been highly dependent on the prices of fur in the world market, as well as on the natural variability of animal populations, the quality of their fur, and the weather in any given year. As already mentioned, by the late 1940s, fur farming had disappeared from the Copper River valley. Local residents continue to trap today, although not to the extent they did in the 1910s, ‘20s, ‘30s and ‘40s when demand for furs and pelt prices were high. Today, the interest in furs is low and prices have subsequently dropped. The amount earned on fur sales is so low that the expenses of a snowmachine and gas that are necessary for running a trapline are greater than the small income received. It is just not worth the effort. The average price for furs has declined. For example, in 2011 a red fox sold at auction for \$52 while in 2015 it was only \$16. In 2011, a wolf sold for \$245, while in 2015 it was down to \$157, wolverine went from \$269 to \$208, and beaver from \$32 to \$10 (Parr 2016:43).

The decline in trapping is also influenced by non-monetary reasons. David James, a non-Native trapper who lives along the Alaska Highway near Northway and traps in the Scottie Creek, Forty-Mile and Taylor Highway area, has observed a marked decline in the number of trappers on the eastern side of the Wrangell Mountains: “It’s changed a lot. There’s not many of them now” (James 2015). While David James continues to trap, the amount of trapping he does and how far afield he ranges have declined as he has gotten older and in poorer health. The same may be true for other non-Native trappers in the region who began when they first arrived and were young, but have not been able to maintain the high intensity of activity that is required to be a productive trapper. In comparison, the traditions of trapping in the Native community also have not been maintained to the same level they were in the past. Many of the currently active Native trappers are of an older generation. One of the victims of this decline in trapping is the practice of going out to spring muskrat camp (“going ratting”). This was a standard part of the Ahtna and upper Tanana seasonal round and was



Hardy Trefzger at his home on a fox farm on Knight Island showing some of his taxidermied waterfowl, circa 1925. Alaska State Library, Kayamori Photograph Collection, ASL-P55-526.

something that children and families often looked forward to with the brighter and warmer days of spring. Some non-Natives took up muskrat trapping when they could get a good price for the furs, but as the demand for muskrat fur waned, the market collapsed. According to David James, he is one of the few muskrat trappers—Native or non-Native—left in his area.

In '77 and '78, two years in a row, I hung 16,000 muskrats. From the Northway and Tetlin area. Last year, I got 900. The older people that had to live off the land and used to get muskrat have died off. So there are lots of muskrats now, and very few people out trying to get them (James 2015).

While the old-time romantic idea of being a trapper out on the trail in the wilderness might attract some people to give trapping a try, only a small percentage of folks currently trap at more than the hobby level or do it long-term. As Dean Wilson Jr. explains:

Trapping's hard work. Your success ratio for a lot of people isn't good. And, man, between all the things stackin' up against you anymore to trap, you need a snowmachine that can handle it, you need ten grand in steel and snares, and then it's hard on your back. You know everything you lift is heavy. And not everybody is good at it. By and large people get tired of trappin' after a while (Wilson and Wilson 2010).

Nevertheless, as in previous times, there are still folks who continue to trap because they love the lifestyle. It provides a good way to get outside during the winter months, and they enjoy the challenge of navigating in the backcountry and learning and improving their animal tracking skills. In his 1980 article, "Trapping Furbearers in Alaska: A Legacy and, Perhaps A Destiny!", William Schneider expresses reasons why some Native village residents might desire to continue trapping:

High fur prices have provided increased incentive for fur trappers to participate in at least part of the trapping cycle. But even more important than the financial returns from trapping (and they are generally not high when compared with wage labor) are the values derived from being able to maintain contact with traditional areas, traditional skills, and family associations out on the land (Schneider 1980:18).

Many long-time non-Native residents in Wrangell-St. Elias communities also have a long family and personal history of living off the land and a desire to maintain their own cultural traditions and connections to the landscape. What Schneider said in 1980 about Native trapping history in the more northern interior of Alaska can also be applied today to non-Native trapping in the Wrangell-St. Elias area:

The long history of trapping can not [sic] be denied. The meaning of that heritage to people today is demonstrated in the efforts to maintain ties with the land and the lifeways. In a rapidly changing world the opportunity to maintain ties with the past provides a basis for continued success and personal as well as group esteem.

An understanding of these values is reinforced by the example of newcomers who are attempting to establish a tradition with the land. The newcomers may, in time, follow the pattern of the miners and others who, in the past, turned to trapping, married local people, and are now part of the heritage.

...The difference between the newcomer and established villagers may be that the newcomer finds the heritage appealing and is searching to establish that way of life. The established trapper knows his roots, recognizes that the future will demand some changes but desires to maintain ties with the way of life which he has identified with all his life... (Schneider 1980:18-19).

For Ralph Lohse, the legacy of trapping in the Wrangell-St. Elias area is critical. "I would hate to see anything happen so that it was not available for the next generation of young people who dream about that kind of a lifestyle" (Lohse 2010). And for some, earning just a few extra dollars from the sale of furs can be the difference between success or failure in rural Alaska.

However, questions remain about the future of trapping, and whether the current and future generations will be willing to do the hard work required of such a land-based lifestyle. For the most part, young people today have not been raised in the woods learning the skills of survival and success as their predecessors may have been. Many of them are more interested in their computer, phone, and television screens than the outdoors just beyond their windows. Our society and culture have changed since the first non-Natives came to Alaska, many of whom came from farms or other rural settings and were familiar with a rustic way of life not that dissimilar to what they encountered in Alaska's wilderness. People today are not accustomed to or willing to do the hard work that pioneer frontier living used to require, such as collecting and splitting firewood, hauling water, breaking trail, hunting and preserving your own food, and feeding and caring for a dog team. We have an easier lifestyle with electricity, running water, a grocery store nearby, television and the Internet. It is a rare breed of modern human who is willing to "go back" to the old way. Other reasons why there

are fewer trappers now than there were 100 years ago include: a change in the fur market; warmer temperatures leading to thinner and lower quality fur development in the animals and subsequent lower sale prices for the pelts; a lack of sufficient ice cover on rivers and lakes in the early winter making travel to trapping grounds during the best season dangerous or outright impossible; and the ability to earn more money through wage labor. Given the current environmental, social and cultural picture, how many trappers will still be out following the footprints of small mammals in the snow in the next 100 years?

Endnotes

¹ For more about the history of trapping in interior and northern Alaska, especially the Native role, see Schneider 1980.

² For more about why Native trappers participated in the fur trade, particularly in Canada, see *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relationships and the Fur Trade* by Calvin Martin (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978); and *Indians, Animals and the Fur Trade: A Critique of Keepers of the Game*, edited by Shepard Krech III (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1981).

³ In the 1800s, there was a lucrative Russian and British fur trade in Alaska, especially in the upper Yukon and Bering Strait regions. For more about this history, see *Furs and Frontiers in the Far North: The Contest Among Native and Foreign Nations for the Bering Strait Fur Trade* by John Bockstoce (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁴ For more about John Hajdukovich and his experiences with the Upper Tanana Indians in Tetlin, see “John K. Hajdukovich and the Tetlin Indians, 1924-1941” by Michael C. Brown (*Alaska History* 14(1-2), 1999:1-29). Also, see *John Hajdukovich Papers* archival collection, Alaska and Polar Regions Collections & Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

⁵ For more about the trapping lifestyle of Slim Williams and his wife, Aileen Gallaher, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, see Gallaher and Gallaher 2004.

⁶ For more about the life of Slim Williams, including his 1933 dog team expedition from Alaska to Washington, D.C. and the motorcycle trip he and Jack Logan did in 1939 from Fairbanks to New York over the proposed international highway route, see *Alaska Sourdough, A Story of Slim Williams* by Richard Morenus (New York, NY: Rand McNally & Company, 1956); *Alaska: Our Last Frontier* by Slim Williams (Washington, D.C., 1934), “Two on Two: The Slim Williams Story,” segment produced by WBBM-TV News in Chicago, originally broadcast August 3, 1975 (AAF-9436, Alaska Film Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks); “Slim and John’s Great Adventure” film by Tom Morgan (Anchorage, AK: KAKM-TV, 1993); and “Slim Williams Story, Reels 1-6” (AAF-9549 to AAF-9554, Alaska Film Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks).

⁷ Although by 1929 Carl Whitham had discovered gold at Nabesna, McKennan makes no mention in his journal of prospectors or mining. Whitham was just in the process of staking his claim so the Nabesna Mine was not yet up and running when McKennan was in the area. In addition, McKennan was there during the winter when any prospecting would have been on seasonal hiatus, and he was focused on documenting the Native culture in the upper Tanana region so mining would not have attracted his attention.

⁸ The Alaskan context and the international fur market in general at that time is being extrapolated from documentation of Canadian fur prices dropping to record lows during the 1930s (Ray 1990:114-129).

⁹ See the *Alaska Trappers Manual* (Alaska Trappers Association, 1991) for detailed descriptions of different types of traps and sets to use for various species. Also John Bockstoce provides good descriptions of snares and other methods used in northern Alaska in *Furs and Frontiers in the Far North: The Contest Among Native and Foreign Nations for the Bering Strait Fur Trade* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ More information about subsistence hunting and trapping on federal lands in Alaska is available online at: <https://www.doi.gov/subsistence/wildlife>. For an informative summary and guide to the latest annual Federal subsistence hunting regulations contained in the Code of Federal Regulations (36 CFR Part 242 and 50 CFR Part 100), see *July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2018 Federal Subsistence Management Regulations for the Harvest of Wildlife on Federal Public Lands in Alaska* published by the Federal Subsistence Management Program, Office of Subsistence Management, Anchorage, AK. Available at: https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/wildlife_regs_16-18_correctedreduced.pdf (accessed March 6, 2017).

¹¹ Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Alaska Trapping Information webpage, <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=trapping.main> (accessed September 20, 2017).

¹² Tor Holmboe was born in Tromso, Norway on October 3, 1925 and passed away on March 25, 2011. Besides trapping in the Wrangell Mountains, he and his wife, Norma, trapped on the Yukon River and the White River in Canada, and he was a commercial fisherman. For more about Tor, see his obituary in the *Peninsula Clarion* newspaper: <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/peninsulaclarion/obituary.aspx?page=lifestory&pid=149124863> (accessed March 6, 2017).

¹³ For more information about current trapping licensing and regulations, see *2016-2017 Alaska Trapping Regulations*, Effective July 1, 2016 - June 30, 2017. Juneau, AK: Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Available at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildliferegulations.trapping> (accessed December 20, 2016).

¹⁴ Les Heglund was one of six McCarthy residents killed in a shooting spree at the airstrip on March 1, 1983.

¹⁵ For more information about the history of fur farming in Alaska, see Isto 2012.

¹⁶ John McCrary also established a log roadhouse at the homestead site, and when that structure burned in 1909, he built the modern, frame-constructed Copper Center Hotel, which burned about 1920.

¹⁷ In 1966, George Bellefontaine moved to an assisted living home in Sitka, Alaska. He died on December 24, 1967 and is buried at the Pioneer Cemetery in Palmer, Alaska (US DOI NPS 2013:56).

CHAPTER 5

IN SEARCH OF BIG GAME: SPORT HUNTING GUIDES

Making a living in or near Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve has always involved vigorous exploitation of rather limited opportunities. Outfitting and guiding hunters and fishermen has recently become a lively industry, but little demand existed for such services earlier (Hunt 1996:201).

SPORT HUNTING IN THE 1920s AND 1930s

Hunting has always been a dominant feature of the Alaska lifestyle. Living off the land by providing fresh meat for the family has been the Native tradition for generations. Non-Natives who migrated to Alaska followed this same routine. It was critical to their survival. They hunted moose, caribou, bear, mountain sheep, mountain goat and small game.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, big game hunting was a popular activity for wealthy Americans. It was a particular favorite pastime of President Theodore Roosevelt. By the 1920s, these men had already hunted out the vast western territories of Montana and Wyoming, and were looking for someplace new. They turned their attention to the wilderness of Alaska for their next great adventure, which at the time was only accessible by steamship on a long voyage from Seattle. Rugged terrain and harsh conditions made the remote Wrangell Mountains the ideal place to test their skills and pit themselves against all that nature might throw at them. The record-size Dall sheep rams, moose, and caribou were the main attractant. Due to the demands of a thirty-day hunt done on horseback, hunters who came from outside of Alaska (non-residents) hired local hunting guides.

Due to increasing concerns about management of wildlife populations, federal game laws started to be enacted, including requirements for the hiring of guides. One of the first places this occurred in Alaska was on the Kenai Peninsula where “nonresident hunters were required by the law of 1908 to hire a registered guide” (Sherwood 1981:119). The Alaska Game Commission was established in 1925 to provide more localized control of hunting. This included having the authority to enact regulations affecting guides and determine where sportsmen would be required to employ a guide (Ibid). When Alaska became a state in 1959, state hunting regulations were put in place, including requirements that non-residents hunting mountain goats, Dall sheep, and brown/grizzly bears hire a guide (McDowell Group 2014:6). For sheep hunting within the Wrangell-St. Elias area, it was believed that guides would know best where to find the game, since they either lived in the area or had been hunting there for many years (Murphy and Dean 1978:29). The goal was to ensure a safe and successful hunt. As long-time Wrangell Mountains hunting guide Bud Conkle explains:

State law required that nonresident hunters had to be guided by a licensed Alaska guide when hunting sheep. This was a conservation as well as a safety measure; few nonresidents had the necessary experience with sheep to judge the horn size of a trophy ram. The law at that the time required that the horns of a ram be at least three-quarters curl—that is, when viewed from the side, the horns had to describe a 270 degree arc. Further, Alaska’s mountains are often steep, rugged, and dangerous; sudden storms in the mountains can kill the unwary. While climbing for mountain sheep isn’t the rope-and-piton type, it can still be hazardous even for the experienced (Conkle and Rearden 1990:73).



Lorain Roberts, with rifle, and Mrs. Wooldrich sitting on rock promontory above Johnson Creek, circa 1913. Alaska State Library, Lorain Roberts Zacharias Photograph Collection, ASL-P178-135.

Subsistence hunting in the Wrangell-St. Elias area is well documented, but sport hunting mostly went unrecorded.¹ One of the first organized guided hunting trips in the Wrangell-St. Elias area written about in popular hunting literature was published in 1917 in *Hunter-Trader-Trapper* magazine. In the article, “The Sheep of the St. Elias Alps,” Harold W. McCracken, who was a renowned trophy hunter, photographer, and explorer, recounts a month-long hunting trip from McCarthy into the Wrangell-St. Elias Mountains toward Mount Logan in search of trophy sheep (McCracken 1917). The next major hunting expedition to be retold in written form was published in 1921 as the book *In the Alaska-Yukon Gamelands* (McGuire 1921). In 1918, James A. McGuire hired Captain John. P. Hubrick (known as “Cap”) in McCarthy to outfit and guide his expedition to collect specimens for displays in the new Colorado Museum of Natural History in Denver. Cap Hubrick was an early guide frequently hired by visiting hunters. He rushed north in 1897 in search of gold, reaching McCarthy in 1913. He became one of the region’s first and most famous commercial outfitters, guiding sport hunters out of McCarthy during the teens and 1920s. During the off season, he published a short-lived newspaper called the *Copper Bee* and produced superb hand-tinted panoramic photos. Hubrick died of diabetes in 1930 (Bleakley 2006:56).

The McGuire group arrived by steamship in Cordova on August 7, 1918, and took the train to McCarthy where they met up with Hubrick. Over the course of 39 days, they traveled by horseback through Chitistone Canyon and Skolai Pass to the White River, hunting sheep, goats, moose and caribou whenever they could. They returned to McCarthy on Sept. 17. According to McGuire’s account, they traveled a total of 7,200 miles at a cost of \$7,200; \$1,800 each for the four people on the trip or \$1.00/mile (McGuire 1921:195). McGuire apparently thought this was a good deal, because he indicates that other outfitters at the time charged \$2,500 for one man for a 40-day hunt (Ibid). While Hubrick was the outfitter who supplied the horses, the camping gear and food, and was the lead guide, he also employed a team of men who helped make an expedition like this possible. Bill Longley was



Men at Hubrick's camp, circa 1920. Photo by H.P. Hubrick. Gail Steen Collection, Cordova Historical Society, 88-34-3.

head packer, Billy Wooden was a horse wrangler, Shorty Gwin a packer, Jimmie Brown a packer, and Jimmie Fujii (Japanese) the cook.² But as McGuire goes on to describe the trip, it becomes apparent that Longley, Wooden and Hubrick were the main ones who led the clients to game.

Despite the McGuire group's success of coming home with a number of trophy sheep and having the adventure of a lifetime, McGuire felt that Hubrick was overzealous by killing animals himself, instead of letting the client, in this case McGuire's hunting partner Harry James, have the shot:

I afterward learned that his reference was to Hubrick, who had fired at the goats before giving Harry a first chance. In this he committed a grievous mistake, as James was naturally entitled to not only the first shot, but to all if he wanted them. ...He told me that of the four goats stretched out before us, Cap had killed three and he one out of a band of twenty-four; furthermore, that Cap had opened fire on them first at a distance of sixty yards, killing a nanny, a 3-year old and a kid... (McGuire 1921:63-64).

Another published account of a hunting expedition in the Wrangell-St. Elias area was in 1919, again to the White River. George O. Young, a West Virginia state senator, tells the story of his group's adventure in *Alaska-Yukon Trophies Won and Lost* (Young 1947). Young joined two other men, Dr. A. H. Evans from southern Texas, and J.C. Snyder from Illinois, who he did not know before joining the trip. Cap Hubrick was still guiding out of McCarthy, but was unavailable that year having "contracted out to two brothers from Boston named Mitten" (Ibid:103). So Young's party contracted with Morley E. Bones, an outfitter from the Yukon Territory. Since the trip began in McCarthy, Bones and his crew came over with their pack horses from Whitehorse via a Kluane Lake route. Young indicates that they had up to thirty-six horses and Bones was joined by Indian Paddie (Paddie Smith), Indian Johnnie (Johnnie Frazier), and Eugene Jacquot (a white man who was cook). Billie Slimpert was hired in McCarthy because he knew the surrounding country better and was an expert horse wrangler and packer. "Hunting over the planned distance required a small caravan of packhorses and several men, including experienced Natives, to manage the animals" (Hunt 1996: 202). As Young explains, horses and a good horse handler were critical for a long hunting trip like theirs:

A horse-wrangler on an expedition of this kind must be experienced in handling horses, know how to properly pack them and how to make the many different kinds of hitches that must be used. Slimpert had had much experience along this line, having gone to Alaska and the Yukon in '98. Since that time he had prospected, hunted, trapped, and freighted supplies back into the interior—with pack horses in the summer and dog teams in the winter. He had had charge of large numbers of horses for the contractor during the building of the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad (Young 1947:30).

Indians being along as guides for Young's group may not have been so unusual, but it is one of the earliest written references to such. It is not known whether Paddie Smith and Johnnie Frazier were paid to work for Morley Bones, and if so how much, but Young's account does make it clear that they were active members of the team. The Indians did a lot of the horse wrangling work. They spotted goats and led men to hunt them (Young 1947:66 & 70). They led hunters to look for game, such as bear and caribou (Ibid:94). They collected small, dry willow for firewood for cooking (Ibid:66 & 70). They skinned and dressed goats after the kill. And at one point, Indian Johnnie was sent ahead on foot across a glacier to select the best trail (Ibid:83). Young seemed to appreciate having the Indians along as he states, "Never have I seen such skill in stalking game as the Indian displayed" (Ibid:131). Or, "While eating, the Indian constantly cast his eyes about in every direction—always on the alert for any signs of game. With the advantage of their wonderful eyesight, they are almost certain to detect anything that appears within their limits of vision. Johnnie is particularly alert in this respect" (Ibid:146-7).

However, from today's perspective some of the views of the time regarding Native people seem racist: "It was their first trip with an organized hunting party. Both of them could speak English fairly well—at least to the extent of being readily understood while they were far above average Indians of that country in intelligence. Paddie could both read and write" (Ibid:29). This different status given the Native men may also be evident in what happened when they had to make an emergency camp: "We put up the small sleeping tent and all of us, except the Indians, crowded into it. The latter slept outside by the fire" (Ibid:206).

Young's trip was also unusual in that instead of backtracking and returning to McCarthy at the end, the plan was to build a raft so that Bones and the hunters could float down the White River into Canada. The rest of the crew would hike out with the horses via Kluane Lake. However, things did not go as planned. The boat with all the trophies and most of the gear was lost in the high water and ice formation of September. The men barely survived with their lives, being rescued by another hunting party they came across who got them back to McCarthy. Guide Eugene Jacquot said:

So far as he knows, the party of Senator Young was the last hunting group to attempt the hazardous trip down the White River. In fact, he states, not since 1919 has anyone ever undertaken as extensive and varied a trip as was made by the Young party. Harry Boyden has brought a few parties across the glaciers to the head waters of the White River and afterwards returned to McCarthy, from which point they had been outfitted. Jacquot recommends that sportsmen contemplating a northern trip to include both Alaska and Yukon should have an American guide for the Alaskan side and a Canadian guide for the Yukon area (Young 1947:Publisher's Epilogue, p.ii).

So what became of these men who risked their lives to guide hunters from the Lower 48 through the wilds of Alaska? According to the 1947 published account of the Young expedition, the Jacquot brothers were still at Kluane Lake, and Eugene took over the outfitter responsibilities in 1937. Indian Paddie died of tuberculosis four years after the Young trip, but Indian Johnny was still alive and in



Riding packhorses along the White River, 1913. John Byram Collection. Courtesy of Dick Anderson and the National Park Service.

1945 became chief of the Campagne Indian Tribe. Billy Slimpert died in 1943 when trying to cross the Nabesna River with a horse. Morley Bones moved to California to a small ranch where he raised foxes and died in 1945 afflicted with stomach ulcers (Ibid:Publisher's Epilogue, p.ii-iii).

Despite some disastrous trips, the White River area continued to be a popular destination. According to Dale Stirling who has written about the historic uses of the White River, "In the early years most of the hunters and guides who visited the area came from Kluane Lake. The pioneer guides were Thomas Dickson, Louis Jacquot, and Jack Hayden" (Stirling 1985:14). In 1925, another big game hunter from the eastern United States wrote about his 1919 trip in the White River Canyon. John B. Burnham, president of the American Game Protective and Propagation Association, published an article "Hunting in the Nutzotins" in *Hunting and Conservation: The Book of the Boone and Crockett Club* (Burnham 1925:412-437). He and his hunting partner, Ernest Mussen, did not hire a guide for their month-long foray from Hazel Creek into the high country for caribou, Dall sheep, moose, and bear, but apparently did run into several guides, including Jimmie Brown, Andy Taylor, Cap Hubrick, and Con Miller from Chisana. According to Burnham, all the men rode pack horses, which impressed him since he and Mussen traveled by foot and used a 25-foot poling boat (Ibid; Ringsmuth 2012a:113-114).

Because of an increase in wealthy hunters, the Alaska Road Commission maintained a trail from McCarthy to the head of the White River from 1921 to 1932, and built a trail shelter at Horsfeld. The route was "passable for pack horses in the summer and follows the river bars for a large part of its length" (Stirling 1985:13). It was named ARC Route-54, but known as the Nizina-Chisana Trail.

Finally, in 1947, Doug Vaden visited the White River area while aerial wolf hunting for the Bureau of Land Management, discovered a herd of free-roaming horses he believed to be wild and decided he wanted to set up a guiding business in the area. He was the first outsider to settle there permanently and "was the most consistent resident for nearly thirty years" (Ibid:19). Like his predecessors, he made a living through a combination of activities; for him it was guiding and trapping. According to Sterling:

Being a horseman himself, [he] decided that he would like to settle in the area because it had the best winter horse range in Alaska. Thus, in 1958 he established himself as a guide in the White River region, setting up camp on North Fork Island in the White

River. He guided hunters from 1962-1983 from May to November of each year, and from 1971 to 1981 he was a permanent resident on the White River. During his years as a guide Vaden ran traplines from his cabin to the border from 1961 to 1983, and many times used a snowmachine on the river ice to access those lines (Ibid:19-20).

THE ARRIVAL OF SPORT HUNTING GUIDES

In the early days of guided hunts in the Wrangell Mountains, the men who became guides were already living in the area, having come years earlier for other reasons. Many had come to the area as miners during the 1898 Klondike and the 1913 Chisana gold rushes. Not striking it rich as prospectors, they turned to other opportunities. Some, like Harry Boyden, Andy Taylor, and Jimmie Brown, hauled freight or mail by dog team over the mountains between McCarthy, Chisana, and Nabesna in the snow-covered winter months or led outsiders through the wilderness. After all this time out on the trail and in the mountains, they became intimately familiar with the region and its major routes. This knowledge and experience lent itself well to the newly developing guiding and outfitting business. It became another way for them to make money. Finding multiple things to make a living was part of the persistence required in order to survive in the lean Alaskan interior. As Geoff Bleakley, former WRST historian has written:

It was always difficult to make a living in the Wrangell-St. Elias region. In the past, like now, game was scarce and permanent jobs were practically non-existent. As a result only the most persistent and adaptable individuals stayed in the vicinity very long. Some, however, spent much of their lives here (Bleakley n.d.a:1).

While their back stories may have been quite different, Boyden, Taylor and Brown were similar in that they all arrived from elsewhere in search of fortune, became attached to the place, worked a variety of jobs and gained reputations as knowledgeable guides, and spent the rest of their lives in the Wrangell-St. Elias area.

Harry Boyden was born in England and came to the Chisana district about 1915. He left in 1918 to participate in World War I, but returned to the area after the war. During the 1920s, Boyden held a contract to haul the Chisana mail, and also began his long career as a hunting guide. During the Second World War, Boyden served as caretaker of Carl Whitham's Nabesna Mine. He remained in the area and died in the 1970s at age 86 (Bleakley 2006:14).

Andy Taylor was born in eastern Canada in October 1875, joined the 1898 Klondike gold stampede when he was just twenty-two years old, and was one of the first prospectors in the Chisana district having first explored in the upper White River country starting around 1900. His claim on lower Bonanza Creek supported him for a number of years. Having hauled his own supplies from McCarthy to the mine, Taylor became intimately familiar with the mountains. This served him well when he later carried commercial freight and mail over these same mountain routes. Taylor applied that same mountain knowledge by becoming a hunting guide in the late teens. By the early 1920s, Andy Taylor had gained an international recognition as an expert outfitter and guide. He was known for his organizational and backcountry skills and leadership talents, as well being a good trip companion who was well read, friendly, and interesting to talk with. Taylor died in May 1945 (Bleakley 2006:118; Bleakley n.d.a:1-2).

Jimmie Brown was born about 1880 and worked in the Wrangell Mountain region as a prospector, guide, freighter, and trapper. Over the course of the teens and 1920s, he was employed as a hunting guide by both J.P. "Cap" Hubrick and Andy Taylor, and also sometimes worked for the Alaska Road Commission. Brown was known to spend winters with the Ahtna near Nabesna. He died at his cabin on the Nabesna Bar about 1940 (Bleakley 2006:17).

In these early years from 1900 to the 1930s, McCarthy and Chisana were the main jumping off points for a guided sport hunting expedition into the Wrangell Mountains. Starting in 1911, with discovery of copper at the Kennecott Mine, the Copper River and Northwestern Railway (CR&NW) ran from Cordova, where the steamships landed, up the Copper River valley to Chitina, and all the way through to McCarthy. This made for easy access to the hunting grounds. By this time, former prospectors and freighters like Harry Boyden, Jimmie Brown, and Andy Taylor had shifted to doing more and more guide work as a way to make a steady seasonal living, and their services were in high demand. Experienced men like Boyden and Taylor also were able to apply their backcountry and guiding skills to other types of expeditions, such as scientific collecting or mountaineering expeditions. For example, in 1919 Harry Boyden led a scientific party of Edward D. Jones, Mr. McClellan and his son, and a taxidermist from Los Angeles in search of specimens for their museum (Young 1947:69), and in 1924 Andy Taylor and Jimmie Brown guided the Frank C. Baldwin and Milton B. Medary expedition to the northern slopes of the Wrangell Mountains to collect specimens for the US Biological Survey and the Smithsonian Institution (Medary 1924; Hunt 1996:204). They hunted grizzly bears, caribou, mountain sheep and goats on a fifty-day expedition from McCarthy through relatively unexplored territory to the headwaters of the Chisana and Nabesna Rivers. According to Medary's diary, their party was one of three that had gone so far into the region (Ringsmuth 2012a:114; Medary 1924:68).

Taylor also was an expert mountaineering guide and was involved in a number of first ascents in the St. Elias Range, including 19,551 foot Mount Logan in 1925, and later of Mount Bona (16,421 feet), Mount Fairweather (15,325 feet), and the first recorded north-south traverse of the central St. Elias Mountains (Bleakley 2006:118).

Throughout this early period, the Ahtna and Upper Tanana people continued to live off the land and rely upon hunting, fishing and trapping for their survival and livelihood. Their hunting grounds ranged from the Copper River valley, to the Nabesna River, to Chisana, to the White River, to the Upper Tanana River, to the Ketchumstuk and Mansfield areas, to the upper Forty-Mile country. As mentioned by anthropologist Robert McKennan, who spent the winter of 1929/1930 living in Chisana, Nabesna, and Northway, there was also market hunting (Mishler and Simeone 2006). Mining, railroad or road crews would pay a Native hunter for locally harvested meat to feed the men in camp. But for a Native to be hired specifically as a guide for a sport hunting party was something different, and did not seem to happen as frequently.

By the 1930s, sport hunting in the Wrangell Mountains was becoming more and more popular and the guiding industry began to expand. Guides like Lou Anderton and Lee Hancock arrived on the scene. Anderton came to the region in 1922 to complete the tunnel connecting the Erie and Jumbo Mines at Kennecott. He went on to work for other mining operations in the Nizina and Chisana districts, including prospecting on Rex Creek and working a claim on Bonanza Creek. In the late 1940s, he operated a store and guiding business out of Chisana City (Bleakley 2006:3).³ Lee Hancock married a local Ahtna woman, Laura Nicolai, and settled in the Chistochina area, so guiding made sense for him as a sustainable and economic business venture. Lee operated a guiding business and hired local Ahtna to be assistant guides until the late 1960s when his health prevented him from continuing and he turned the business operation over to his stepson, Wilson Justin.

In the 1930s, Chisana and Horsfeld were popular as bases for hunting operations. There were old buildings to use, they had good places to graze and overwinter horses, there were airstrips, and they offered easy access to good hunting grounds. In the late 1930s, local hunting guides, like Harry Boyden and Lou Anderton, began using the Horsfeld site as a base for hunting operations, especially in the Beaver Creek Valley. Similar use continued during the 1950s under Larry Folger, and during the 1960s under Paul Jovick. In the 1970s, Ray McNutt took over guiding operations in Chisana and Horsfeld from Paul Jovick and bought his equipment, horses, and property (US DOI NPS 2010a:3). Following the establishment of Wrangell-St. Elias National Preserve in 1980, the NPS



Campsite on the 1925 Mount Logan Expedition. Guided by Andy Taylor, the team traveled from McCarthy to complete the first ascent of Canada's highest peak. Norman Read Mount Logan Papers, UAF-1992-174-1085, Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

issued Ray McNutt a series of concession permits authorizing him to continue utilizing the Horsfeld facility (Ibid). Ray McNutt continued to guide out of Horsfeld and Chisana until his retirement in 2003 (McNutt 2015). Terry Overly, who operates the guiding business, Pioneer Outfitters, has been the guide most recently basing operations out of Chisana. He learned to guide from his stepfather, Bud Hickathier and mother, Elizabeth, who was one of the first licensed female hunting guides in Alaska. Bud Hickathier took over Lou Anderton's Chisana-based guide business in 1957, and Terry has kept the family business going since the mid-1980s. Like his predecessors, Terry relies on horses for his hunting trips and emphasizes that the wilderness experience is as important as the hunting (Pioneer Outfitters 2016). Currently, WRST is the only national preserve in Alaska where hunting guides still use horses (M. Keogh, pers. comm. 2017).

SPORT HUNTING IN THE YAKUTAT AREA

The Tlingit people have traditionally occupied and used the part of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve in the vicinity of Icy Bay, Disenchantment Bay, and the Malaspina Glacier and Forelands (Deur et al. 2015). This section of coastline was important for Tlingit for traditional resource harvesting and had been used by Russians for sea otter hunting, but it was too rugged and dynamic for extensive, permanent human settlement.⁴ Tlingit had temporary camps and sacred places in the area, and then after World War II motorized boats made it safer and faster for the Tlingit of Yakutat to once again reach these traditional hunting grounds and re-establish subsistence camps and cabins (Ibid:135).

According to a 1986 Alaska Department of Fish and Game subsistence report, mountain goat hunting continued in the Yakutat Forelands from the 1920s to the 1940s, including by non-Natives (Mills and Firman 1986:170), but, in general, use of this region by non-Natives for land-based hunting has a less documented and more recent history. One of the first documented non-Natives to guide hunting trips in the Yakutat area was Hardy Trefzger, a hunter, trapper, trader, prospector, and guide who arrived in Yakutat in 1911, settled there, and later became US Commissioner (Trefzger 1963).

Yakutat was a Tlingit village of about 300 people, and he became intrigued with their life and customs and soon tried living off the land himself. He spent many years traveling the country while hunting, fishing and trapping, and he eventually applied this knowledge to become a guide. It is unclear where around Yakutat he took clients for hunting and whether or not it was within the boundaries of what is now Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. But it is clear that by the 1940s and 1950s, when outside interest in bear hunting in the Yakutat region was on the rise, Trefzger was taking clients on hunting trips (Trefzger 1963; Hunt 1996:202).

All these early hunting guides and outfitters did not come to the Wrangell-St. Elias area specifically to be guides, but fell into the business as a way to help make a living in a place with limited options for regular employment. The only paid jobs at the time were working for a mining company, the railroad or road commission, being a US Commissioner, Marshal or game warden, or maybe running a store, roadhouse or post office. Even these were not reliable and highly seasonal occupations. They were able to succeed as guides because they had spent time on the land, knew the country and its animals. As Hardy Trefzger explains:

I have known of none who has grown rich by guiding. To be a good guide one not only must know the country where one guides, but must know game and their habits. A guide also must be able to take care of any and all trophies, know how to make a comfortable camp and, not the least by any means, how to prepare palatable food. If he is also an outfitter, he must have a plane, cabins and a boat or horses. This represents quite an outlay of cash, without taking into consideration a well-filled larder (Trefzger 1963:108).

While Trefzger said this in reference to his guiding from 1920 to 1950, it applies to any time period. Even those who came later and came specifically to be guides struggled to make a living. Diversification was key. Like his peers, Don DeHart not only guided in the Wrangell Mountains, but led trips to other parts of Alaska at different times of the year in order to keep the business a year-round enterprise. For example, he did polar bear hunting by Native operated dog teams in Point Hope in the spring, went to Kodiak and the Alaska Peninsula for bears in the fall after sheep hunting, and led float trips on the Yukon River in the summer (DeHart 2016).

SPORT HUNTING IN THE 1950s AND 1960s

After World War II, interest in sport hunting increased. During the war, it had been a favorite pastime of military men stationed in Alaska. Upon discharge from the military, many stayed in Alaska and pursued more hunting. “The increase in hunters coincided with the reduction of the cost of hunting in remote regions such as the Wrangell-St. Elias with the availability of small aircraft for transport. Over a relatively short time span, what had been an expensive, elitist venture became a sporting experience available to almost anyone” (Hunt 1996:207). Trips could now be shorter since getting to Alaska no longer took weeks by steamship, and by flying into the mountains a client did not have to spend another couple of weeks out in the wilderness traveling by horseback. This shortened travel time and cheaper methods of travel all contributed to trips becoming less expensive and more affordable. It also made it possible for a regular working man to fit a hunting trip to Alaska within his standard two-week vacation. This helped increase the popularity of such trips and broaden the type of clientele who participated.

By the late 1940s and early 1950s, folks looking for a new way of life with a rural emphasis, like Bud and LeNora Conkle, Bill and Lorene Ellis, and Don DeHart, moved into the Copper River valley. Their original intent to settle in the area specifically as hunting guides set this new crop apart from earlier guides like Boyden, Taylor, and Anderton, who had come to the area for things like prospecting

and later shifted into guiding for supplemental income. While many of these new guides had airplanes, they still maintained the older traditions of taking clients out for long periods and using horses and walking to reach the best hunting grounds. They established basecamp operations at a lake or in a town like Slana, and used spike camps or temporary tent camp facilities during the hunts. Mary Frances DeHart, Don's wife, described their basic operation:

The minimum hunt was 10 days, usually 15 to 21 days, and just one hunter, or one to two. Each hunter had their own guide. We used horses strictly. We did not have a plane, so backpacked in with horses and also set up three main camps in the Little Tok area, Mentasta area, and the main camp was in the Copper Lake area. It was a little over 30 miles in from here. It was too far for the horses for a one day trip; it was a two night trip. We used the Copper Lake area our first night up in the sheep country. The main camp was set up ahead of time, and we always had a full-time cook for each of the camps. The hunters would come into Slana, usually were flown into here, possibly stay a night or two at our Hart D Ranch, and then they'd go out with us on horseback. From the main camp, we would set out what we call spike camps. Up in sheep country, they get out too far to really come back to the main camp at night, so they would take a backpack, a tent, and enough supplies for a night or two in case they had to stay out away from the main camp (Dehart 2016).

Bud and LeNora Conkle were one of the first to set up a permanent hunting lodge and guiding business and live year-round on the Nabesna side of the range. They drove to Alaska in June 1946 and stayed in Fairbanks for three years looking around for a location where Bud could do some big-game guiding. Bud obtained his pilot's license and they discovered the Tanada Lake area. They fell in love with the place and settled there. The first winter they lived in Nabesna next door to Harry Boyden and learned the way of the land and lifestyle. They started building at Tanada Lake and had an operational lodge by 1950. Bud started guiding in 1951 and by 1970 had obtained his master guide license (Alaska Master Guide License #19). Bud would fly clients into the lake from Slana or Glennallen, and they would use pack horses and walking to get farther into the mountains mostly for Dall sheep hunting.⁵ LeNora Conkle describes getting started in the business:

Our early years were lean, and every dollar we took in was badly needed. We did receive a \$500 deposit for a 20-day fall hunt from our first non-resident big game hunter. It saved us. Upon our request for a loan our Fairbanks banks said, "Sorry. You're too far away from civilization. You'll never get enough business to be profitable."

Two years later that same bank willingly deposited a thousand dollars in our checking account when we telephoned from the Lower 48 states where we were visiting, no questions asked. "Just pay it back after hunting season." We also had good credit for groceries, car repairs, and aviation gas at Valdez.

The improvements came slowly. Two comfortable chairs and green linoleum on the floor. Oil cloth on the rough table that Bud built. Yellow curtains at the windows. With our white enamel cooking range, our little cabin had a homey atmosphere. I could comfortably seat eight fishermen and hunters at the table. Word-of-mouth spread the news that the Conkles produced good big game trophies; that there was fine fishing at Tanada Lake and on nearby lakes where Bud could fly; and that our lodge provided comfortable quarters and good food, and that Tanada Lake Lodge was a warm friendly place to visit (Conkle and Rearden 1991:224-231).

For the first years of building their lodge and establishing their business, the Conkles lived at Tanada Lake and Nabesna year round. In the summers, they would work on the lodge building and in the winter they would trap. Bud was able to really get to know the country, and thereby be better at guiding clients to where the animals were. As LeNora Conkle explains, they were happy with the life they had created:

Our dream of building a wilderness lodge at Tanada Lake became a reality. When we started, Tanada Lake was considered to be wilderness, and bankers we asked for financial help thought we were too far away from the mainstream to attract clients. They were wrong, of course, and we were right. Tanada Lake became a financial success. However, there is a time for everything. In the 1950's and 1960's sportsmen came from far and wide to enjoy the lodge, the hunting, and the magnificent surrounding wilderness (Ibid:273).

In later years, Bud and LeNora Conkle purchased 160 acres at Cobb Lake and developed their homestead, "Eagle Trail Ranch," at Mile 58 on the Tok Cut-Off Highway. They kept their horses on the ranch, stored their airplane in a hangar, and used it as a base of operations for their business. Bud was a registered master guide and pilot, so he led hunting trips around Alaska, including the Alaska Peninsula for brown bear and the North Slope for polar bears in the spring. This helped keep his business going year round, so he was able to make a living solely as a guide, pilot and lodge owner. "In the summer of 1960 Bud used the Super Cub on floats to spot salmon for the *Valiant Maid*, a commercial seine boat fished by Ed Bilderbeck in Prince William Sound. The income from that one summer gave us enough to pay off the bank loan for the new airplane" (Ibid:251).

Bill Ellis was another Nabesna-based guide who arrived in the 1950s with the same dream of making this his livelihood. Originally from Texas, Bill had learned to fly with the idea of becoming a bush pilot in Alaska. In 1957, he purchased land and buildings at the end of the Nabesna Road from well-known big game guide, Harry Boyden. The first few years, Bill and his wife, Lorene, and their children just spent summer and fall in Nabesna, going back and forth from Anchorage, but in 1960 they moved out full-time. As his son, Cole Ellis, remembers, "It was our first time with no electricity. No running water. No nothing. Dad had already been guiding and was looking for an area that we could all move into and make it. He was trying to get far enough away from the crowds and all the people. That's how he ended up way back here" (C. & L. Ellis 1993). Cole's brother, Kirk Ellis, adds, "And he liked this spot. Of any of the places, he said that this was the best spot that he found, 'cause it wasn't real wet and the weather wasn't real violent. And he liked the mountains 'cause they were close" (K. Ellis 1993).

Like Bud Conkle, Bill Ellis guided in other parts of Alaska in order to make a living as a full-time guide, which meant leaving his wife and four children alone on the remote homestead for long periods. For instance, when hunting polar bears in northern Alaska, he would be gone for two months. Lorene describes what this was like:

Well, we just lived here, I don't know. Sometimes it was kind of scary if one of the kids got sick or something, but otherwise we did okay. I guess you'd say it's kind of rough sometimes, but we seemed to survive. In the winter, we trapped and kept busy, knowing we had school and things like that, so we were always busy. At night, you had to do your chores. And if the lanterns failed that was kind of hard. During the day, the kids had to either haul snow or go get water. You couldn't get the water a lot of times, because the hole was frozen over, so you melted snow.

And we were always careful. We didn't use anything that was dangerous. Like the chainsaw I used it and I didn't let the kids use it until they got older to where they

could at least stand up and hold it. You were just real careful, because it was a hundred miles to the hospital. The closest neighbor was Jack John who was six miles away. He was an older Indian, and he turned out to be a really good friend. The next neighbor was at Mile 26 (C. & L. Ellis 1993).

Bill Ellis taught his sons to hunt and they were soon helping him with guiding. With their love of the outdoors and growing up in such a remote location, Cole and Kirk Ellis followed in their father's footsteps. They became pilots and registered guides, and joined the family guiding business. They took over in 1998 after Bill Ellis passed away. The Ellis family continues to operate Devil's Mountain Lodge as a bed and breakfast lodge at the end of the Nabesna Road and fly clients into the mountains for hunting and recreational activities. Despite many bureaucratic hurdles to contemporary guiding, the Ellis family tenaciously hold on to the land and lifestyle that has given them great satisfaction and a sense of personal accomplishment. The Ellis family is rare in that guiding and flying has remained a family business. Many of the guides who were contemporaries with Bill Ellis in the 1950s were single man operations. They hired assistants and employees, but had no one in the family interested in carrying on the lifestyle the way the Ellis family has. Bud and LeNora Conkle's son did become a pilot, like his father, but by the time he was of age to take over, guiding was becoming more restricted and he did not see it as a viable lifestyle. He became a commercial bush pilot.

THE USE OF HORSES

The accounts of McGuire and Young demonstrate that pack horses were an essential part of any hunting expedition in the early period. But not just any horse would do. As Young explains:

Most of the horses used by the outfitters of Alaska and the Yukon Territory were originally wild cayuses, captured in Oregon or other western states, and shipped North. We were told that many of them are unable to endure the extreme cold; but if they survive the first winter they usually become acclimated and are able to shift for themselves (Young 1947:55).

While the introduction of the airplane in the 1930s made it easier to access the backcountry, most hunting guides at the time, such as Lee Hancock, Bud Hickathier, Bud Conkle, Bill Ellis and Don DeHart, continued to use pack horses for their trips. A month-long hunting trip required too much gear, equipment and food to be able to carry it all in on the backs of the clients, especially if trophies and meat were to be hauled out. And the journey, time in the wilderness, and tracking of animals were all considered to be part of the experience. Sportsmen of the time were seeking just such an adventure. The number of horses each outfitter had in his herd varied over time and among outfitters, but in describing his use of horses for trips from Ptarmigan Lake, Urban Rahoï said, "Eighteen was the most horses I had at once, because when I had two guides working for me and it was busy, you wanted to let the horses rest in between trips so you needed extras" (Rahoï 2014). While using horses helped make the trip easier on the hunters, it required an outfitter to employ more staff, including horse wranglers to care for the animals and keep them shod, and packers to make sure everything got safely to its destination.

Bud Conkle at Wolf Lake, Ray McNutt in Chisana and Urban Rahoï at Ptarmigan Lake walked their horses in from Canada and the Alaska Highway.⁶ The horses were kept safely in corrals during the summer and hunting season. When out on the trail, they would be left to roam in the evenings and have to be rounded up every morning, or tied to a tree. Strategies for caring for the horses in the winter varied from guide to guide. In the 1940s, Harry Boyden wintered a team of horses near the Nabesna Mine and Glacier. He hired local Ahtna resident Lena Charley as their caretaker. She would



J.P. Hubrick's base camp, circa 1920. Photo by J.P. Hubrick. Gail Steen Collection, Cordova Historical Society, 88-34-5.

check on the horses, making sure they had enough feed and were healthy. This exposure to horses is what gave Lena enough experience for Lee Hancock to hire her in 1949 as a horse wrangler and packer. She was the first Alaska Native woman to become a registered assistant guide. Bud Conkle and Don DeHart brought their horses out every winter. The Conkles kept their horses at their ranch near Slana, but according to Mary Frances DeHart they wintered their horses in Fort St. John, Canada and Delta, Alaska.

When Don was living, usually we wintered our horses down at Fort St. John on Canadian pasture. It was too harsh a winter to winter them here in Slana. You can't keep water for twenty head of horses or feed. There is no good feed here. Most of the hay we bought for feed was from Fort St. John and trucked in. Then when Don died and it was just mother and I running the business, I did not have the time and couldn't leave to make the long trip down the Alaska Highway to Fort St. John. So I did the wintering at Delta Junction. Don had had a 65,000 acre grazing lease from BLM in the Copper Lake area where we would bring the horses back in the spring, usually in May, before we started using them on trips. When Don died in 1977, I was able to keep that lease. But when the park was established, that lease was closed one winter just overnight. The park's regulations ended up taking precedence over the federal BLM lease. So then I had no place to bring the horses back in the spring. I would keep one horse here at the ranch, possibly two, so that I could ride, but I couldn't keep all of them here (DeHart 2016).

Some guides in the Chisana and Horsfeld areas let their horses roam and graze freely during the winter months. In the spring, the horses that had not starved to death or been taken by wolves would

then be gathered up and brought to the guiding business' home base or base camp. Urban Rahoi felt comfortable letting his horses roam in the winter from his base at Ptarmigan Lake:

My horses never got more than about five miles away and they stayed within the limits. Other people's horses take off on them and everything, you know. But I think the reason why mine didn't is because we fed them in the wintertime. Grained them all the time. Then this equine society comes in and says we got to water them, we got to do this and that, and all this stuff for them. I just told the park service I don't have to do that with mine because when they get hungry and they're in trouble they come in. They'll let you know because they'll even go rub against the house. It's unbelievable what these animals do in respect to wanting to get you to give them something to eat (Rahoi 2014).

While the reliance on horses declined with the increase in the availability of small airplanes for hire, a few guides continued to use horses. In 1968, Ahtna guide Wilson Justin and his brother, Calvin, took over the guiding business from their stepfather Lee Hancock, and continued to operate mostly with horses. They stopped guiding around the mid-1980s. In 1961, Terry Overly took over Pioneer Outfitters in Chisana after the death of his stepfather, Bud Hickathier, who had taken over the business in 1957 from Lou Anderton, and followed in Bud's footsteps by continuing to offer horse-based pack and hunting trips. Cole Ellis also has enjoyed continuing to use horses in their family business:

I've used horses a lot in guiding. They've been a real help to me. I use them a little different than a lot of other people. The main reason is 'cause I can't afford as many as I'd like, where I can take groups of people. So a lot of times, I won't actually take hunters out on the horses, but we'll get the game and then I'll use the horses to bring it in. Or if I got an older guy or a guy that's not in real good shape, I'll take him on the horse. I may not even ride one myself. I may have my pack on mine. Or just ride him across the river (C. & L. Ellis 1993).

Wrangell Outfitters, based out of Horsfeld and owned and operated by brothers Will and Mark Koehler, is another company that still offers both hunting and wilderness trips by horseback. As their website explains, their continued use of horses is intentional:

The hunts offered by Wrangell Outfitters are targeted toward the sportsman who wants a very classic and exclusive experience... Horses are used to access the distant corners of the hunting area and help to create the nostalgic feel of the classic Alaskan Safari. We do not look at nature as our enemy or adversary. The concept of "man vs wild" is as foreign to a true bush man as the concept of "man vs living room" would be to any man who lives a house [sic] (Wrangell Outfitters 2016).

INTRODUCTION OF THE AIRPLANE

Access was critical to the success of sport hunting in the Wrangell-St. Elias area. First the railroad from Cordova to McCarthy and then the McCarthy Road and Nabesna Road provided the only means of easy access. However, some of the best hunting, especially for sheep, was high in the mountains and far away from these land-based routes. Early hunting guides rode horses to cover the distances needed to travel to base camps and the prime hunting grounds. And then clients walked from there. With the arrival of aviation in the 1930s, people began to realize how planes could provide easier



Dall sheep horns displayed at hunting camp, November 1976. The Super Cub (background right) was the preferred aircraft for transporting sheep hunters. It was known for its ability to land almost anywhere. Courtesy of Howard Knutson.

and faster access to these historically isolated mountain regions. Well-known pilots such as Charles “Harold” Gillam, Merritt D. “Kirk” Kirkpatrick, Merle “Mudhole” Smith, and Bob Reeve based out of Valdez, Cordova and Chitina and flew mail, freight, and passenger charters. But “hunting charters were few and far between” (Ringsmuth 2012a:114). These men were pilots first, not guides. They may have pioneered mountain flying in the Wrangell and Chugach Mountains, but most of them went on to develop statewide reputations as accomplished aviators beyond the local region.⁷

Pilot Howard Knutson preferred to use an airplane for his guided sheep hunts in the 1960s and 1970s, rather than horses. He found horses impractical in the high places where he was hunting on the western side of the Wrangell Mountains. And he felt it was safer to have an airplane close by in case of emergencies.

For sheep hunting, horses are just in the way. I know a lot of guides used horses on the north side of the Wrangells, but that is kind of different country. A lot of our country isn’t really good horse country, especially for sheep hunting. You are limited on where you can take a horse, where a man can climb almost a vertical wall. The horse can’t do that. So it was a matter of what was a horse going to do for you? I really think that horses are a nuisance. You spend more time taking care of the horse than you do hunting. I couldn’t see where horses did a person much good. Maybe for moose hunting.

Besides you need an airplane for an emergency. For safety reasons. A lot of guides got flown in, but at that time we didn't have communication like we do now. No satellite phones or anything like that. It was just not as safe an operation as it would be now. So flying yourself in and landing you felt safer 'cause you had your own plane there. I may have had a base camp at the airplane, but I always packed a camp for myself and the client so we could spend the night wherever we were. It is the only way to go. If you tried to come back to base camp every night, it would be a lot of extra walking, and it would totally defeat the purpose of being able to get high up there and close to the sheep. But at least by flying in, you had the plane nearby (Knutson 2016).

The Great Depression (1929-1939) caused a decline in wealthy sportsmen flying to Alaska to hunt, but the build-up of the military in Alaska during and after World War II increased the numbers of sport hunters interested in harvesting big game. Many old-timers believed that these "newcomers lacked the previous generation's sportsman code" (Ringsmuth 2015:162) and game wardens were concerned about increased "hunting pressure on Alaskan game animals" threatening the populations (Sherwood 1981:3). From the 1940s through the 1970s, this influx of fly-in hunters had negative effects on subsistence hunting and on wildlife populations. Another culprit was the airmen and construction workers at the Northway airfield (Goldschmidt 1948:47; Haynes and Simeone 2007:119; and Ringsmuth 2012a:115).

Natives whose very life depended upon the fur and meat animals were filled with resentment at soldiers who shot for mere pleasure, frequently not even picking up the carcasses of the animals so destroyed (Goldschmidt 1948:47).

A 1978 study by University of Alaska biologists Ed Murphy and Fred Dean attributed a decline in the mountain sheep population to overharvesting (Murphy and Dean 1978).

The influx of military hunters during World War II not only affected the numbers of animals available to hunt, but impacted the guides and their businesses. After a court battle over equal access to hunting, in 1942, military personnel with at least one year of residency in Alaska were given resident hunting privileges; this meant they could hunt without a guide (Sherwood 1981; Hunt 1996:207; Ringsmuth 2015:162-163). Waiving the requirement that these servicemen had to hire a professional hunting guide impacted guiding and outfitting operations in the Wrangell-St. Elias area; the client population and source of the guides' income suddenly shrunk significantly.

By the end of the 1940s, the increased availability of small aircraft for hire completely transformed sport hunting in the Wrangell Mountain area. Access was now easier and cheaper. The use of airplanes became popular for all types of recreational activities, whether for tourism, hunting or fishing (Ringsmuth 2012a; King 2008).

In addition to regular mail routes and random charters, Cordova Airlines flew anglers to the glacially carved Tebay Lakes, near Bremner Mine in the Chugach Mountains, which were part of Cordova Airlines Sourdough Tours. In an attempt to repeat Ray Peterson's Angler's Paradise success in Katmai, Merle Smith encouraged his pilot Jack Wilson, and his wife, Jo King, to establish a camp at the lake to attract what he called the "well-heeled" fly fishermen (Ringsmuth 2012a:91).

With this increase in options for local air travel, by the 1950s fly-in sheep hunting to the Wrangell Mountains grew in popularity. Aviation-based hunting trips could be shorter than the horse-based expeditions, thereby becoming affordable to more people. In addition, state law required nonresident

sheep hunters to be accompanied by a registered Alaska guide, and many of those guides were now only using aircraft.

The post-war period also brought significant changes to Yakutat. Sport hunting (and fishing) was becoming a growing concern on the coastal side of the Wrangell-St. Elias area. Like the Ahtna and Upper Tanana, Tlingit traditional hunting practices are based on balance and respect and using the animal as food, while trophy hunting targets only the largest animals and often is not going to be eaten. The people of Yakutat were worried about guides coming in from outside and the hunting practices they were following:

Bears, for example, were only shot by Tlingit hunters if they entered a camp or settlement and were considered a danger. Ray Sensmeier remembers bear hunting guides operating out of Manby in the 1960s and 1970s for trophy hunting purposes: "Most of the guides are not from here. A lot of them aren't even from the state. ...We had a few guides a long time ago but that's not something that we condone. They're doing bait, bear baiting which I have a real concern about because put meat in a certain place and then they'll wait and the bear will come and they shoot it. And not for food, because they don't eat bear meat. They're hunting for sport. I can't understand how you can kill something for sport" (Deur et al. 2015:163).

It is not clear whether the guides based out of Yakutat were hiring local people, as in the Ahtna region, and therefore contributing something to the local economy.

INCREASE IN GUIDING BUSINESSES

By the 1950s, demand for pilot-guides was increasing, and new flying and guiding services began to crop up in the Copper River valley. Men like Bud Conkle and Bill Ellis arrived with the intention of being hunting guides, not pilots. In fact, Bud Conkle only learned to fly once he was in Alaska, finding it a useful means of getting around the territory and increasing his options as a guide. As his wife, LeNora, said, "We couldn't have built our guiding and lodge business to the extent that we did without an airplane. Wings proved to be the key to our success" (Conkle and Rearden 1991:249). Many men had learned to fly during World War II and came to Alaska seeking a new kind of adventure. They soon set up their own air taxi businesses for taking passengers and freight around the Wrangell-St. Elias area.

These new pilots, like Cleo McMahan or Jack Wilson, became more than just pilots. They guided clients on hunting and fishing trips. And they established permanent homes and based flying operations out of places like Gulkana, Meiers Lake, or Glennallen, which were closer to sheep habitat and good hunting spots and had better flying conditions than the coastal port communities that had previously been the aviation hub for the region.

Cleo McMahan arrived in Alaska in the late 1930s and ended up working in Gakona at a Civilian Conservation Corps camp. He went to Fairbanks in the winter of 1941, which is when he learned to fly. In the spring of 1946, he bought a bright yellow J-3 Cub airplane. Compared to Conkle and Ellis, McMahan had not planned to become a guide, but just sort of fell into it. As he explains:

All I wanted the airplane for was just to get around Alaska by myself, 'cause I didn't like messing around with dog teams. It was a two-place tandem sixty-five horsepower little airplane. And I bought it especially to trap with. And I was workin' summertimes for the highway department, and then wintertimes I'd trap with the airplane, and people got to wanting me to take 'em huntin' and fishin' so much, that I just finally quit the highway department and just flew the airplane and trapped. I think it was

about 1950 before I ever got a commercial license. To begin with there weren't many hunters really. I had just a few. Two or three that'd come out every year from Anchorage or Fairbanks. About 1950, '51 or '52, I started to get non-residents. Lloyd Pennington from Snowshoe Lake is the one that really got me started guiding. He was an Indian or part Indian from Oregon, I believe it was. He was up here and he worked for the fire control. That's where we first got to know him. He was a real good trapper; got lots of fur. And he was guiding, and started to get non-residents before I did. He'd have me come along with him because my J-3 airplane was a little bit better in short, small lakes than his Aeronca Chief (McMahan 1993).

Cleo McMahan first started guiding on his own in 1950. He recalls his first clients: "I finally got to guidin' about 1950. Before that, all I had was resident meat hunters, mostly. And once in a while I'd get a bear hunter. But the first clients I think I had were from Byers, Colorado" (Ibid). By 1960, Cleo McMahan established McMahan's Flying Service based out of Gakona. McMahan's become a well-known and well-respected business that hunters, fishermen, wildlife officials, and geologists often used for the next fifty years it operated. Cleo's business was more outfitting than guiding. He, or his wife Daphne, would pick the clients up in Anchorage or Fairbanks, drive them to their lodge at Meiers Lake, and the next day would fly them out to hunt. As Cleo explains:

For a long time, there was no laws that you couldn't just land and shoot the same day. And there was so much game and no competition that it was very easy. But for several years up until the 1950s, most of 'em went out and camped and hunted on their own. When I started to take guided hunts, then, of course, I'd hire a couple of guides to help me. Never did hire anybody else to fly. And then I had one pretty good camp clear over in the Tetlin Indian Reservation. I used an airplane to get there and then we mostly walked to go hunting. I had a Weasel over there for a while, which is a surplus army tracked vehicle from World War II. But we didn't use it much. Then a fellow named Kenny Saylor moved in here close to us at Gakona and he had horses. He was a horseman, so we went into partnership with him, and he hunted with me and my boys for several years over in the Tetlin Indian Reservation (Ibid).

In the Copper River valley in the 1940s and 1950s, it was not possible to rely solely upon summer flying and guiding in the local area to make a living and support a family. Cleo McMahan used his skills to do other types of flying, such as aerial wolf hunting for the bounty, and wolf and polar bear hunting in northern Alaska. In 1958, he made his first trip north to hunt polar bears with co-guides Chuck Gray and Leroy Schaible. Like Bill Ellis and Bud Conkle, Cleo then spent two months every spring for the next fourteen years doing this. Also similar to the Ellis family, Cleo's two sons, Harley and Chuck, became pilots and continued the family business.

Jack Wilson was another Copper River valley based guide and pilot who, like Ellis, Conkle, and McMahan, came to the area, fell in love with it, and stayed. He differed from them in that he came a bit later and he started as a commercial pilot who then split off into his own air taxi and guiding operation. Jack came to Alaska in 1952 from Colorado and was a pilot for Cordova Airlines. Starting in the mid-1950s, he was flying more and more people into the Wrangell Mountains for mining, recreation, and sheep, moose, and caribou hunting, that he saw a business opportunity and set up his own air taxi and guide business. He started Wilson's Air Service in 1956 in Chitina, and it was the first locally operated air taxi since Harold Gillam's air service in Chitina in the 1930s. In 1959, he moved his operation to the Gulkana Airfield, six miles northeast of Glennallen. Jack Wilson wanted to be more than a pilot so added guiding to his services. He flew clients to spots high in the mountains for sheep hunting or

into a camp on the lower slopes of Mount Drum that he used as a base for hunting moose and caribou. There, he had a cabin and used an old Weasel to retrieve the clients' meat and trophy antlers and haul the remaining parts of the moose and caribou carcasses back to camp for further butchering and cleaning. Many of the fly-in hunting base camps like this ended up being inside the boundaries of what became the national park and after 1980 could no longer be used.

Just like those who mixed subsistence activities with the wage economy or trapping to make a little money to survive, pilots like Wilson relied on diversification. In the summer, he flew miners to their remote claims, scientists to glaciers, or mountain climbers to distant peaks. In the fall, he guided and flew hunters. In the spring, he flew to the North Slope for polar bear hunting. In the early 1960s, Jack Wilson also flew clients in for other guides, such as Hal Waugh, who led sheep hunting trips into the Wrangell Mountains. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, Jack felt competition from these outfitters and their non-resident trophy hunters encroaching on his hunting territory, so he decided to focus more on flying:

Hunting season became practically a panic. There were outfitters all over the country by then, catering to the non-resident trophy hunters. They were encroaching on all my old hunting country and crowding the daylights out of me. There was not a thing I could do about it, however. They had a perfect right to do what they were doing. I just moved over and did more of their flying for them (Wilson 1988:210).

After switching his focus to flying, Jack Wilson became well-known for pioneering glacier landing techniques. Given this talent, he was hired by many mountain climbing and scientific expeditions to land them on the dangerous high glaciers in the Wrangell Mountains. For example, from 1961 to 1965 Jack was the pilot for Carl Benson, a glaciologist with the Geophysical Institute at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, who was studying the interaction between the glaciers and the volcanos of the Wrangell Mountains. Jack wrote about many of these adventures in his books, *Glacier Wings and Tales* (Wilson 1988) and *The Quest for Dall Sheep* (Wilson 1997). Carl Benson praised Jack's flying and glacier landing skills:

I have known for over 20 years that Jack is a first-class pilot, and have landed (and taken off again) many times with him in wild places between Kotzebue and Alaska's eastern border. The most exotic landings by far were those on skiis [sic] in the Wrangell Mountains and especially on various parts of the summit of Mt. Wrangell itself at elevations of over 14000 feet (sic). To fly with Jack at high altitude in the mountains must be like flying with an eagle—he finds and uses thermal updrafts better than anyone else I have flown with (Wilson 1988:11).

The fly-in hunting that grew in popularity alongside increased use of aircraft was much different from the guided hunts carried out in early times with horses. As LeNora Conkle said, "We were into the beginning of a new era when small aircraft was replacing the outfitters who booked thirty day hunts, using pack and saddle horses in their business" (Conkle 2000:28). Wilson and McMahan may have been some of the earliest outfitters who switched from horses to airplanes for their hunting trips, but other airplane-based outfitters included Herb Haley and Howard Knutson in Chitina; Bill Etchells in Kenny Lake; Floyd Miller, a pilot and proprietor of Northway Airport Lodge who started flying hunters into the White River area; and in later years Gary Green in McCarthy, and Frank and Sue Entsminger who live near Tok and often get flown in and dropped off for their guided trips by others who are pilots. The increased use of airplanes caused another shift in the sport hunting in the Wrangell Mountains – the need for better landing strips. While aviation was first established in the

region now encompassed by Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve in the early 1930s, there were only a few gravel airstrips, most of them associated with mines or small communities for mail and freight delivery (Ringsmuth 2012a; Janson 1981).

By 1957, Chisana had replaced McCarthy as the hub for regional hunting. Cordova Airlines expanded the bush strip there so that its pilots could fly in food for pack horses in its DC-3. The airline continued to fill its DC-3 with nonresident hunters, ferrying the hunting parties between Anchorage and the strip at May Creek (Ringsmuth 2012a:117).

Just as airplanes themselves were providing better access to the Wrangell-St. Elias area, the development of remote airstrips added another level of access never seen before. Early pilots, like Bud Conkle or Urban Rahoï, used float planes to fly their clients into their lodges on lakes, but still used horses and walking to access sheep country. By the early 1960s, Jack Wilson wanted to establish higher elevation base camps closer to the sheep areas he had discovered, so he started building his own landing areas.

At first he made a couple of airstrips near the headwaters of the Chitina River, which unlike past big game hunts into the region, were located on the southern flanks of the Saint Elias Mountains. He managed to land up in the “Slot” about three miles above the terminus of the Chitina Glacier. Building an airstrip usually meant a lot of brush removal, and moving rotten logs and big rocks, and filling holes (Ringsmuth 2012a:116-117).

Wilson also built an airstrip at what he called Sheep Gulch where he could safely land a Super Cub (Ibid:117). Other guides soon followed suit. In the 1970s, Urban Rahoï built a runway at Ptarmigan Lake so he could more easily bring in clients and supplies rather than having to rely on landing a float or ski plane on the lake, depending on the season. His runway even has two lights on it so he can land at night if necessary (Rahoï 2014).⁸ Urban claims that others guides established remote airstrips for guiding purposes, but did it after passage of ANILCA and establishment of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park when such construction was no longer allowed:

I felt that was a mistake when they started letting them build airstrips in the park. When the park was formed up here, they said there would be no more airstrips built. Period. This one guy built an airstrip up in there and they justified it because he cleared it by hand. Now that’s got me madder than hell because they said no airstrips. As far as I am concerned, none of them airstrips ever should have been built. Let them do like people did before and walk. They used to land on Ptarmigan Creek and people would walk way back there. And some of the guys landed them on the bars down there in the White River and they walked up there. They would fly clients in, but they never landed in the backcountry. That’s why I’m kind of tee’d off about the airstrips (Ibid).

MAKING A LIVING AS A GUIDE/OUTFITTER

Being a resident hunting guide in the Wrangell Mountains from the 1940s to the 1970s was not easy. It took a lot of ingenuity, determination, and creative financing to make the business a success. And for those who stayed in the area year round, it took a lot of fortitude and hard work to survive the harsh winter conditions at a remote homesite with few amenities. LeNora writes about how hard they worked to keep their business going in the early years:

Our fall hunting seasons lasted but about two months, but they seemed longer. We worked from five a.m. until late night nearly every day. During evenings, hunting stories unfolded around campfires in spike camps, or at the dinner table in our main camp, making it an interesting time with interesting people.

There was a constant need for supplies. It was my job to drive to Anchorage or Valdez in our new Ford station wagon to do the shopping. Sometimes I drove to Anchorage and met incoming clients at the airport, or sometimes they flew to much closer Gulkana where I would meet them. Then I often drove them back to Gulkana or Anchorage when their hunts ended. Frequently Bud flew the airplane with a load while I drove the Nabesna Road. In the spring or after heavy rains the creeks ran over their banks, and there were planks on hand, and it was up to whoever drove the road to put the planks in place and carefully drive across. I was pleased that I could do this. Most of the creeks had gravel bottom, and if the water wasn't too deep I could ford them without the planks.

If I didn't arrive on time, Bud flew over, he would see that I was stuck. And he would land on the nearest lake and walk to help me. At the time no one lived on the Nabesna Road, and often days went by without a single vehicle driving it. When I had a flat tire I had to jack up the wheel and change it (Conkle and Rearden 1991:246).

Other guides did not live in the area year round, but came to their lodges seasonally and ran hunting operations from there. Examples include Urban Rahoi, Ray McNutt, and Howard Knutson.

Urban Rahoi came to Alaska in 1947 having learned to fly in the military in World War II. He first flew charters for miners and other groups going into the Brooks Range. He discovered the Wrangell-St. Elias area in 1949 when he went sheep hunting at Ptarmigan Lake in the Nutzotin Mountains. He returned in 1951 to guide in the area. As Urban explained in a 2014 oral history interview, "In that particular area where I was, there was an abundant amount of sheep. So I decided to keep going there then after that. So I went in and filed a claim for a trade and manufacturing site. I got five acres" (Rahoi 2014). This is where around 1952 he first built a 12' x 20' cabin with three double bunks and a wood stove, and later a lodge and an airstrip at Ptarmigan Lake. Urban built the house at Ptarmigan Lake first, but explains that he needed a runway because: "When I first started going in there in 1950, I was just using the 185 on floats in the summer and skis in the winter to go in and out of there, so there was a period in between there you couldn't get in and out, so that made a necessity of the runway" (Ibid). Urban's construction of this airstrip on his inholding was initially controversial, but the conflict was resolved through a land exchange. By 1988, he had a grass airstrip (Ibid; Bleakley 2002:74-75).⁹

Urban was always looking for new and "better" ways of doing things, so instead of his hunting clients staying in canvas tents at spike camps, he flew in old sections of large culvert and set them up as small cabins at good hunting locations.

The first years I flew the people from Fairbanks. We just had that one little cabin at the lake, so that was really fair chase 'cause I took a pack on my back and we took rifles and we walked. When we got some place and it got dark that's where we slept right there. This was up on the side of the mountain or down or whatever and it got so I noticed that the guys were getting pretty beat up. I never could find a spot where there wasn't rocks sticking up in their bed. So I started thinking about the need for a better place to sleep. I saw a big culvert one day and I thought, "Hey, you know, if I take that and put ends on it and then urethane around it that could be a place for people to stay." It's unique because I have a king mattress in there and if you turn it sideways you can sleep across and it is long enough that you can actually sleep four

people there. So it worked out real good. And just to show you how good they are, I had two English couples come over for skiing once. They stayed in them culverts at twenty below at night and they said they were perfectly warm all the time 'cause I had it rigged with a stove so you could heat them. Probably the closest one is about five miles or so from the main lodge. The thing is you can walk to it. You can go up there and hunt in a day back and forth, but it was more enjoyable to get up in the morning and be right there at the bottom of the mountain. You'd get up, go outside and stretch and look around. And it would be, "Oh, there's a sheep right there" (Rahoi 2014).

Urban and his wife did not live at Ptarmigan Lake year round. They lived in Fairbanks where their children could go to school, but visited frequently on weekends, and then opened the lodge for summer and fall use. Like the others, Urban was not just a guide. He developed Lakeview Terrace trailer park in Fairbanks, he served on the North Star Borough Assembly, and he operated the Ptarmigan Lake Lodge business for visitors besides just hunters. Urban sees himself as unique among hunting guides, in that he encouraged families to come to Ptarmigan Lake both for the hunting and fishing, but also to experience the wilderness qualities.

I hurt my business in some ways at times too because I was pretty insistent about them guys that should bring their wife along. If the wife couldn't come, how about their daughter or a son? Or how about the grandchildren? Well some of these old timers say well they're married and that this is their way to get away. Well, I got someone so mad they wouldn't even hunt with me, but I just feel that way about it. That this should be a family deal. Everybody enjoying it all together. When we hunted deer back home in Michigan, it was a family deal, you know, and that's why I tried to run things that way. But it was hard to do it and get the money because there are so few of them that want to take any of the family along. It got pretty expensive. But I think back to some of these guys that brought their son or daughter, and, you know, they were jumping up and down more when their kid shot something than when they killed their own. They were more excited and that made me enjoy it more. I totally enjoyed it when it was like that. They were not trophy hunters. They were people coming hunting and we just happened to find one, you see. They shot one or they got their kid to shoot one. That's enough. They went home happy. And it just makes me happy when I see somebody being happy like that. I won't even book a trophy hunter because they're nothing but trouble. Give you a hard time all the time. I get in arguments with these guys that want to kill more and more, you know. They think it's great, but what's so great about killing more. That's what makes no sense to me. Like I say, I have a different philosophy than most of these guides (Ibid).

As mentioned previously, Ray McNutt started guiding out of Chisana and Horsfeld in the 1970s. He came to Alaska in 1952 and homesteaded in Sterling on the Kenai Peninsula. He soon started guiding hunting and fishing trips with partner Harold Anderson. Given the small population in Alaska at the time, Ray McNutt eventually crossed paths with fellow guide Larry Folger, who was based out of Chisana. McNutt took over the Chisana and Horsfeld operation from Folger and Paul Jovick, but in the beginning was only there during the hunting season. He did not stay full time; his wife, Gloria, ran the post office in Sterling, Alaska and did not want to move the family to Chisana. She did take leave from her job to spend a few weeks there each year during the height of the hunting season to operate a bed and breakfast style base camp for clients. Gloria retired from the post office in 1989, and the McNutts then lived full-time in Chisana for three years. Ray McNutt continued to guide out of Horsfeld and Chisana until his retirement in 2003 (McNutt 2015).

Howard Knutson was an airplane-based guide who came in and out of the region. Starting in 1956, he flew for Cordova Airlines based out of Chitina. Like his predecessor Jack Wilson, he flew regular mail flights to places like McCarthy or Chisana, took miners to and from Dan Creek or May Creek, and would periodically drop off a hunter in the backcountry. From flying over the area, and hunting sheep in the high country himself, he learned the terrain and where sheep were located. He realized that he would “rather be on the ground hunting than flying an airplane” (Knutson 2016). He got his guide license in 1959, and in 1965 quit Cordova Airlines and started his own guiding/outfitting business in Chitina called Howard’s Flying Service. He brought clients in for sheep hunting to both the Wrangell and the Chugach Mountains.

My favorite animal is the Dall sheep. I wasn’t interested in guiding for anything other than Dall sheep. I like to climb a mountain and stay in condition and it was an interesting animal to hunt. It is the most challenging. They have very good eyesight, among other things, and it is the hunt that provides the best return. Financially. I mean, people pay more for a sheep hunt than for a moose hunt, for instance. And with a moose, you have to pack a heavy animal and spend a lot of time doing something besides hunting. The reason you get into these things is because you like to do it, right? That is what I liked to do, so that’s what I did (Ibid).

In 1975, Howard recognized that the National Park Service was coming into the area and would shut down hunting. He shifted his focus to guiding hunts in the Brooks Range and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in northeastern Alaska for the next eighteen years. Howard Knutson moved to Anchorage in 1982 and retired from guiding in 1999, at age 69, after badly breaking his leg on a trip in the Chugach Mountains (Knutson 2016).



Ray McNutt riding his favorite horse, Buck, circa 1990. Courtesy of Gloria McNutt.

OBTAINING HUNTING CLIENTS

One of the basic elements of keeping a successful outfitting operation afloat, whether horse or aviation based, was to have enough clients every year to cover your costs. This was not always easy. Those who succeeded were able to make ends meet through diversification of hunting seasons, locations, and doing other work to help pay their bills. The Conkles, DeHarts, Ellises and Urban Rahoi ran lodges in addition to offering guide services so they had paying guests besides hunters. Ray and Gloria McNutt also ran a bed and breakfast accommodation in Chisana, but it is not known how many guests they had besides their hunting clients. Those establishments on the road system operated throughout the summer and fall season, thereby having the opportunity to earn more money from the general tourists and recreationalists passing through. In all cases, advertising was key for attracting clientele. When Bud and LeNora Conkle first started their Tanada Lake Lodge in the 1950s, it



Hunting guide, Howard Knutson, helps a client prepare a recently shot dall sheep, October 1974. Courtesy of Howard Knutson.

was mostly Fairbanks people who came. Some came on their own to hunt and fish, while others hired guides. Eventually, the Conkles advertised in various national outdoor magazines, as well as relying on returning customers and word of mouth. “Once the word was out, the hunters came flocking” (Conkle and Rearden 1990:73). This expanded their clientele to include trophy sheep connoisseurs from around the world who realized that the Wrangell Mountain Dall sheep were the largest and best trophies.

We started to advertise in the leading sporting magazines. Our ads read something like this: “TANADA LAKE LODGE—Big game hunting and fishing, specializing in Dall sheep hunts of 10, 15, and 20 days. Moose, caribou, grizzly, and black bear. Bud Conkle, registered guide, Slana, Alaska.” With recommendations from our many satisfied clients, by the mid-1950s we were fully booked for two and three years in advance (Conkle and Rearden 1991:245).

Don DeHart and Wilson Justin advertised their businesses in similar magazines. But Don DeHart went above and beyond just ads. In the 1950s and 1960s, he promoted his guiding business in Slana by going on lecture tours in the Lower 48 during the winter months. He would travel to places like New York, Pennsylvania, North and South Carolina, and Florida to talk about Alaska and show his 16mm films. He was advertising Alaska in general, as well as the opportunities for hunters (DeHart 2016).

By the 1970s, with so many guiding services available for the Wrangell-St. Elias area, it was hard to stand out from your competitors. Selling yourself as an expert, demonstrating your special knowledge of the animals or terrain, highlighting the experience of the hunt and being in the wilderness, were all tricks to gain an advantage. But Wilson Justin and his brother, Calvin, who took over Lee Hancock's guiding and outfitting operation, said that being a Native-run guiding business actually ended up being advantageous:

We were lucky in one sense. The North American hunting population was raised on this idea that the most skillful, the best hunters in the world, were Indians. So when word got around that our business was all Indian guides, the word of mouth was immediate. Just because, they said, "You're Indian, you gotta be good" (Justin 2015).

And, of course, now there is the Internet; a small business owner's dream for easy and inexpensive advertising. Many of the businesses legally allowed to guide sport hunters in the national preserve today each have a website replete with photographs of beautiful scenery, large wildlife, and happy clients with successful harvests. Those like Pioneer Outfitters, Wrangell Outfitters, and Ptarmigan Lake Lodge are all competing to attract clients.

However, not all the guides needed to advertise. According to Hardy Trefzger who was a hunting guide out of Yakutat, especially for bear hunting in the 1940s and 1950s, "I had never advertised, but for more than forty years I had guided. Nearly every year I had to turn down hunters who wanted to use my services as a guide" (Trefzger 1963:107). From the 1950s to

the 1970s, this high demand for hunting and guiding remained true in the Wrangell Mountains, Chugach Mountains, and the Alaska Range. There was never a shortage of business, at least during the hunting season. Word of mouth was sufficient for getting work. Howard Knutson mentioned using a booking agent, Jack Atcheson in Butte, Montana, as another way to get clients (Knutson 2016).

It was also a matter of building up your own clientele; people who would return year after year and then recommend a specific guide to their friends. While a lot of guiding is about knowing the wildlife and the countryside or being a good pilot, it is also essential that a guide be good with people. You have to get along with a wide variety of people, often in harsh conditions, or for long periods of time. You need to make sure your client is happy, well fed, and has a comfortable place to sleep. Your hunters need to feel well cared for and safe during the hunt, and they need to be assured they will get the trophy they are seeking. The best guides are as much hospitality hosts and logistics coordinators as they are animal trackers.



Advertisement for film presentation by Don DeHart, circa 1965. Courtesy of Mary Frances DeHart.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN GUIDING

While the adventure of flying through rugged mountains or the excitement of tracking a sheep into a steep gully are often highlighted in stories about guiding, this activity did not happen in a vacuum. The mostly men who led these hunts were supported behind the scenes by assistant guides, horse wranglers and packers, cooks, and logistics coordinators. In many cases, the wives were key partners in the business.

Wives and companions of pilot/guides are very important partners in the big game and fish guiding business. They frequently handle most, or all, of the written correspondence throughout the year. They generally do all of the business-related accounting, advertising, and banking. When not in camp they stay home and maintain the home-fires, which includes power generators and/or huge woodpiles. They keep the other aircraft free of snow and protected from moose, caribou, and horses. They transport hunters and trophies, tons of groceries and barrels of gas and supplies. They entertain non hunting spouses and companions. They feed horses, water dogs, sew the airplane covers, repair tents, repair saddles, sleeping bags and frequently, the men themselves (Conkle 1997:182).

The women of these men, perform myriads of other little chores that help make a simple hunt possible, both for the pilot/guide and the hunter. These women were, and still are, paragons, models, of competence and patience – mostly patience. While the men were out having the wild and interesting adventures told about in these stories, the women were waiting at home, ready to handle any and every situation—but always waiting.

Yes, they took care of things while the men were gone with finesse, acceptance, perseverance, and endless patience. I take my hat off and bow to each and every one of them! (Ibid:212)

But the women were more than this. They also were guides and spent as much time in the field as their husbands, whether on the trail or in camp. Elizabeth Hickathier, whose husband Bud guided out of Chisana in the 1950s and 1960s, was the first female registered guide in Alaska. Lena Charley of Chistochina was the first Alaska Native woman guide. She was only twenty years old when she was first hired. LeNora Conkle learned to guide and spent weeks at the base camp at Wolf Lake supporting hunters by caring for the horses, skinning animals, and being the cook. In the 1970s, Mary Frances DeHart became a guide and worked side by side on horseback with her husband, Don. She claims to be the fifth woman to receive a registered guide license in Alaska (DeHart 2016). And since the mid-1990s, Sue Entsminger has been leading hunts for their family's guiding business.

By today's standards, none of this is unusual for a woman. We know that they are just as capable as their male counterparts. But this was not the case when women like Lena Charley started guiding. As a woman, Lena had to prove herself by being extra good at locating game, and being able to carry big loads of supplies or large heavy animals and hides. As Lavell Wilson describes: "She had a big pack on and she takes off down the trail. She likely killed us! She never let up, getting further and further ahead. She was about nineteen or twenty back then, I think. Mighty tough. ...Very energetic, outdoors kind of [person]" (Wilson 2008). But what Lena earned in wages was enough to justify the hardship and the challenges. As she said in a 2015 oral history interview, "They paid pretty good. I came back with enough money to use a lot of it for groceries. And almost all the hunters, they gave me tips all the time" (Charley 2015). And it gave Lena an opportunity to be out in the woods, which she was something she really enjoyed.



Mary Frances DeHart, Slana, Alaska, 2016. Photo by Karen Brewster.



Sue Entsminger, Mentasta Pass, Alaska, 2015. Photo by Leslie McCartney.

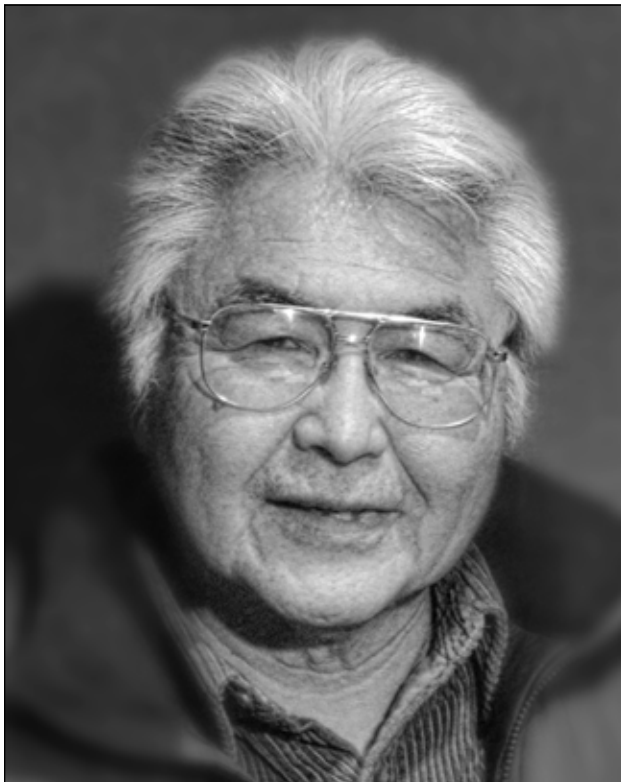
Mary Frances DeHart and Sue Entsminger, who got into guiding later than Lena, both have indicated that they did not experience any problems as women in the guiding business. Mary Frances said the clients knew about her in advance and it was not a problem. As with women in other male-dominated professions, it is likely that these women worked extra hard to prove themselves within the macho culture of hunting and guiding. Nevertheless, all of these female guides and those who helped with the guiding business loved the outdoors as much as their husband partners and stuck with it despite the challenges. They were determined to be guides and do what they enjoyed, so did not let being a woman stand in their way. Despite what Mary Frances and Sue said, given the culture of hunting, it is likely that there were times when it was more difficult for female guides than their male counterparts. Their statements may be more reflective of not wanting to discuss these issues in an oral history interview than the reality of how they were treated (DeHart 2016; F. & S. Entsminger 2015).

ROLE OF ALASKA NATIVES IN GUIDING

Another little known aspect of the history of guiding, particularly in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, is the role of Alaska Natives as sport hunting guides. As previously mentioned, two Indians from Canada helped guide George Young's 1919 expedition to the White River, but there is limited documentation about the hiring of local Alaska Natives during this early period of big game hunting trips. As the guiding industry expanded, there was an increased need for trail-men, guides, woodsmen and weather readers. Local Ahtna and Upper Tanana naturally fit into the industry. Given the traditional Native lifestyle that depended upon hunting and trapping, and their knowledge of tracking animals, navigation, and surviving in the wilderness, it made perfect sense for Natives to accompany hunting parties. It was not uncommon for Natives to assist miners and trappers when they moved into an area and were not familiar with the lifestyle, the game,



Lena Charley, Chistochina, Alaska, 2015. Photo by Leslie McCartney.



Wilson Justin, Chistochina, Alaska, 2014. Photo by Karen Brewster.

or the seasons. They helped the early non-Native explorers mapping and investigating the wilds of Alaska, such as US Army Lieutenant Henry Allen who traveled up the Copper River in 1885 in search of an all-Alaska route to the Yukon gold fields and whose party was fed moose and sheep meat by groups of Ahtna after being unsuccessful in its own hunting (Allen 1887). Many non-Natives trying to survive in the Alaskan wilderness credit their survival to the assistance of Alaska Natives (Allen 1887; Abercrombie 1900a and 1900b; Mitchell 1982; Simeone 2006). And there was market hunting, where mining, railroad or road crews paid a Native hunter for locally harvested meat to feed the men in camp (Mishler and Simeone 2006). However, to be hired specifically as a guide for a sport hunting party was something different. By 1930, trader John Hajdukovich was not only trading, but “now devotes himself to conducting hunting parties” (Ibid:85). Hajdukovich respected and had come to rely upon the Native people of the region and “hired local men as guides and packers for fall hunting expeditions he led in the Alaska Range” (Haynes and Simeone 2007:48).

The Ahtna adapted to guiding as a way to earn income and provide for their families with supplies and leftover meat that the hunters did not take. One of the earliest Ahtna guides was Johnny Nicolai, and subsequently, over the years, other members of his extended family got into the guiding business. In addition to being guides, Ahtna served as camp cooks, horse wranglers and packers.

Until the 1950s, guides did not have to be registered, so Native residents could easily accompany a group. Wilson Justin, of Chistochina, began his guiding career at the age of twelve by gathering wood and hauling water at hunting camps. As he describes it:

Back then, they didn't require Indian guides to have a license. You went out and did your work no matter how old you were, and the guys who had the license [the outfitter] got paid and they took

the credit. But the Natives really didn't get paid. I'd say they got goods more than they got pay. Groceries, basically. A lot of meat. So it was barter. The money didn't start getting into Native guides' hands until the late '50s and early '60s (Justin 2014).

With statehood, came the guide registration system. There are now three basic levels of guides in Alaska: a master guide/outfitter who typically is the owner of the business; a registered guide who takes clients on hunts; and an assistant guide who helps with butchering, carrying the loads, and doing camp chores. They each have their own set of qualifications. This rigid system served as a deterrent to more Natives becoming guides. Being a master guide meant years of previous experience as a registered guide, which was difficult for many Natives to attain given the social/cultural structures at the time. It was easier for them to meet the lower level requirements of an assistant guide. Poor economic conditions in the villages also made it difficult for many Ahtna to afford the guide licensing fees. And the amount of paperwork that had to be submitted was intimidating for people for whom English was a second language and who perhaps had a limited classroom education. Although, according to Wilson Justin, his stepfather Lee Hancock, who operated a guiding/outfitting business starting in the 1930s, required that all his guides be licensed:

Lee was pretty straight-laced about the issue of being licensed. So he always made sure that everybody who worked around the guiding business in his locality had an assistant guide's license. So my uncle Johnny Nicolai, my aunt Lena Charley, and the rest of the family who came into guiding in the '50s, the first generation of guides, did get assistant guide's licenses. In the territorial days before statehood, basically all you needed was a statement from the registered guide. Kinda like having a sponsor. So it was pretty simple to get an assistant's license (Justin 2015).

Lee Hancock gave Lena Charley of Chistochina her start as a sport hunting guide. He recognized her talents as a hunter and horse wrangler and packer and hired her to help on guided trips. She enjoyed the work, the people, and being outdoors, and ended up working in the guiding business for more than twenty years. She was able to pass on her knowledge to other family members who then found jobs as guides, guide helpers, or horse packers. Her experience helped maintain a family tradition.

Gillam Joe was another Ahtna hunting guide. He was born in Chisana in 1946 and grew up in Chistochina. In 1964, he started working for Chisana-based Pioneer Outfitters and guide Bud Hickathier. Bud built on Gillam's subsistence hunting experience and taught him to be a guide. In a 2016 interview, Gillam mentions that he knew full well how to hunt and find animals like moose and caribou, but that he did not know things like how to handle horses, how to cape an animal, and about sheep and bear hunting. He learned these skills from Bud and Bud's stepson, Terry Overly, who eventually took over the business. Terry and Gillam were about the same age, learned to guide at the same time, and spent a lot of time on the trail together so they formed a close relationship; they now think of each other like brothers. Gillam eventually earned an assistant guide's license and worked as a guide for 40 years. He lost his leg in an accident in 1977, and stopped guiding in 1983.

As Gillam's experience shows, not only the good wages, but the relationships that developed between local Native guides and their employers was a key factor for some in choosing to work in the guiding business. In many cases, there was deep mutual respect and close friendships formed. They spent many hours together on hunts, and often there was appreciation for learning skills from each other. In a 2016 oral history interview, Lemmie Charley, who was born in Chistochina in 1935 and worked as a horse wrangler, packer, and guide for about fifteen years, shared the following:

I worked for Bud Conkle because he and I, we got along real good all the time. When I first started skinning, it was a big bull moose. He didn't tell me how to do it, so I do it like how we've been doing it at home all the time. Bud didn't tell me that you have to take the cape off. He and the hunter came back and he looked at it and he said, "This is your first skinning?" I said, "Yeah." He took the hunter away someplace else so he could talk to me alone. He said, "I should've told you how to do it." And now if that was some other boss, he would've got mad, jump around and said you should've asked and all that. But Bud and I just got along good (Charley 2016).



Gillam Joe, Chistochina, Alaska, 2016. Photo by Barbara Cellarius.

Despite guiding in different time periods and for different outfitters, one of the things that all the Ahtna guides mention was learning how to cape an animal. Caping involves the careful skinning of an animal's head and shoulders for a taxidermy mount. This was something completely different from their own subsistence traditions of butchering an animal for food. But, it was a critical skill to have as a guide.

Although early hunting trips used "Indian guides," in most cases the Ahtna were not the owners of the outfitting and guiding business. However in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, one Ahtna family did operate their own guiding business.

By the late 1960s, Lee Hancock was getting ready to close down his guiding business. Up until then, hunting expeditions in the Wrangell Mountains usually lasted 30 days, traveled great distances through the wilderness, and utilized pack horses. In the 1960s, hunts were shortened to around 20 days and the guides created base camps and hunted a particular area. Many still used horses as the preferred means of travel, but

as noted previously, by the late 1960s airplanes were becoming more popular and that changed everything. Clients could now get to hunting spots faster, so trips could be shorter. Many of the old-time guides, like Lee Hancock, did not like this change and sensed a difference in the attitudes of the clientele from wilderness explorers and hunters to someone who just wanted to bag a trophy and go home. With Lee's desire to stop guiding, and increasing health issues, his Ahtna stepson Wilson Justin stepped in. Wilson was raised in Nabesna, was brought up on stories about guiding from family members, and started guiding when he was 17 years old. After graduating high school in 1968, Wilson began to head up the operation under Lee's supervision. They continued to follow the old ways of using horses, hunting for days at a time, and relying on skill to track and find animals. In a 2015 oral history interview, Wilson talked about why he liked guiding:

I came out of a situation where guiding was an extension of the kind of life that I lived. It was something I liked to do and it was a way to participate in being out in

the country and getting game. Maintaining that contact with that kind of life and that backcountry stuff was important to me. Most everybody after 1970 got into the guiding business mainly and only to make money. But to me, it was part of the background, the landscape, and part of the family, so you got into it like a fisherman would in Kodiak and it would be second, third generation (Justin 2015).

With pressure from the hunting magazine industry and hunting clubs in the Lower 48, the orientation of clients began to shift more and more toward quick, trophy-based hunting trips. This is not what Wilson Justin had in mind when he started guiding, so he ended up leaving the guiding business in the mid-1980s. As he explains:

I was really beginning to feel that the clients were starting to turn into monsters. I was beginning to get a sense of the change where it was getting too big and too fast and too different for me to really enjoy it. I really enjoyed guiding. Really, really enjoyed it, but what it was turning into was really making me feel like I didn't like that business. The last time I guided was 1988 (Justin 2015).

While guiding continues to be a lucrative business venture in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, it appears that currently all commercial sport guiding/outfitting businesses there are owned and operated by non-Natives. The State of Alaska's list of registered guides does not indicate whether individuals are Native or non-Native.

It is clear that there has been a change in the Native role in guiding in the Wrangell-St. Elias area. Part of this change may be due to stricter guide requirements that are harder for Natives to meet, as well as a change in the type of sport hunting that is done. Back when long wilderness trips on horseback were the standard, the Ahtna's specialized knowledge of the woods and animal tracking was invaluable. However, when short trips in an airplane to grab a trophy became the norm, there was less need for these skills. The Ahtna no longer had an advantage as guides.

There is also the possibility that local perception of these later airplane hunters influenced whether Ahtna continued in the guiding business. Some Native subsistence hunters felt negatively about some of the airplane hunters. The perception being that these hunters are just out for trophies, waste meat, and do not have a respectful attitude toward the animals. This is contrary to traditional Ahtna values. The early sport hunting guides' emphasis on time in the wilderness better fit with the Ahtna way of life. So, as with Wilson Justin who got out of the guiding business because of his dislike for the changing attitudes, perhaps this was true for others. No matter what the reasons, it is clear that there is no longer the same place for Ahtna guides as there used to be.

There also were some opportunities for Tlingit to work as guides in the early years, although it is not known how many did or how long this situation lasted. Hardy Trefzger was one Yakutat guide in the 1940s and 1950s who comments about hiring Natives:

In earlier years it was difficult to get good guides when one had a party of three or four hunters, but of late years the Fish and Wild Life Commission have relaxed their regulations to the extent that a guide can hire an assistant, for whom he is totally responsible. I have found that Indians fill this job satisfactorily, but of course I assumed full responsibility. Also, it has become necessary for a guide to know something about photography, since most hunters cherish the pictures they get on a hunt as much as the trophies they bring home (Trefzger 1963:108).

BECOMING A SPORT HUNTING GUIDE

The guides who were based out of local communities like McCarthy, Chitina, Gulkana, Gakona, Tok, or Nabesna and lived in these places year round had a connection to the Wrangell Mountains. They felt close to the place in a similar way as Natives who are connected to their ancestral landscape. These early guides adhered to the concept of fair chase, and felt that they respected the animals and managed the population by being careful of what animals they took. They did not feel that everyone coming to the Wrangell-St. Elias area to set up fly-in sheep hunting businesses did. With the advent of faster and more reliable airplanes, and before exclusive hunting use area laws, there were more and more guides coming to take advantage of the wealth of game and trophy-sized sheep in the Wrangell Mountains. Many of these guides lived in other parts of Alaska and just brought in out-of-state clients for quick trips to harvest game and then leave. With no restrictions on hunting areas, this was all legal. These guides and hunters had no connection to the place, the people, or the sustainability of the game population. Local subsistence hunters resented the taking of what they considered to be their game. And locally based guides felt the squeeze on the areas that they had long been utilizing. They saw a depletion of the game. They felt the animals were being harassed. They felt there were too many hunters taking trophies and impacting the overall population growth. Those who had been using horses felt airborne land-and-shoot hunting was unsporting and that the clients were not respectful of the animals. It seemed to them that these new hunters were just out for a big trophy instead of the entire wilderness and hunting experience of past clients. As Howard Knutson describes it:

To begin with, we could go anywhere. Then there got to be too many guides. It didn't get to be fun anymore and a guide area really didn't protect you because like I say there were too many guides in the same area. It was totally competitive. A lot of disagreements between guides as to areas. People were very possessive. You don't want to go into the same area as another guide and hunt the same sheep because that is not fair to the hunter. It is just impractical. It got to be more and more guides, so it did happen that you'd go to an area and there was already another guide there. I didn't take these things so seriously as a lot of guides did. I just figured I know the country better than most of them so I know all the other places to go to hunt (Knutson 2016).

In the early years, it was not uncommon for hunting parties to run into each other out on the trail. There were limited travel routes into and through the mountains that could be used with horses, and certain preferred campsites along the way. "One of the men who had gone ahead returned to report that he had found a large basin between the base of the mountain and the shoreline moraine, which would make a very good camping place. He also stated that someone was already camped within the basin" (Young 1947:68). While the guides probably did not share too much information about their plans or the location of the game they were after with their competitors, there was a definite sense of camaraderie that they were all in this together. They would certainly have come to each other's aid in the event of an accident or other emergency. Their lives were all equally at risk.

For younger guides coming into the business, learning the trade from older guides and outfitters was standard practice. For instance, Urban Rahoi got into guiding by having contact with an old-timer who had been guiding in the area before him. Terry Overly started hunting, trapping and fishing in Alaska in 1958 and learned to guide from his stepfather, Bud Hickathier (Pioneer Outfitters 2016), as did Gillam Joe from Chistochina. Wilson and Calvin Justin started as camp helpers when they were boys and eventually learned the guiding business from their stepfather, Lee Hancock. Gary Green learned from Howard Knutson. It was common to first start as a cook, a horse wrangler, or a packer, and then move up into to being an assistant guide as more direct hunting and client experience was

gained. In some cases, an assistant guide apprenticed for enough years to be competent enough on his own to earn a registered and/or master guide license.

Many local owners thrived after being trained by a mentor. One of the earliest to do this was Bud Conkle, who worked as an assistant guide in 1950 for Cleo McMahan's hunting outfit at Meiers Lake on the Richardson Highway. Cleo recommended Bud for his Registered Guide's License. Bud and Cleo teamed up for polar bear hunting out of Barrow for eight years and aerial wolf hunting in the Brooks Range along the way (Conkle 1997). Other examples include Bill Etchells who worked for Bud Conkle and flew a second airplane when polar bear hunting in 1969 and 1970, and then went on to start his own flying/guiding business in the Wrangell Mountains; Gary Green who first worked for Howard Knutson and after getting his pilot's license went out and started his own outfitting/guiding business; and Terry Overly and Wilson Justin who each took over operations from their stepfathers. Mary Frances DeHart learned the guiding business from her husband, Don DeHart, a guide based out of Slana, who at eighteen years her senior already had a lot of experience:

I grew up hunting groundhogs, keeping them out of the hayfields. Squirrel and rabbits. This was just hunting from your home on the farm, usually keeping the small varmint out. But here it was a whole different story. Learning a completely different type of hunting and learning how to pack. Carry a backpack and using horses as pack horses. I'd always had a horse since I was three years old, and did a lot of riding in Ohio, but never did any packing. And then learning to cook on a Coleman stove or with a little wood stove. A lot of it was just learning via Don (DeHart 2016).

CHANGES IN THE GUIDING BUSINESS

Although working your way up through the ranks in guiding continues to this day—and is almost necessary given the strict licensing requirements where you have to prove knowledge and experience—some of the old-style camaraderie changed as the area became more and more popular and there were more guides in the area.

Outfitters and guides in Wrangell-St. Elias exercised considerable influence on the state's game management policies in the 1970s. By 1975 some 250 guides worked in the region, including two master guides and twelve registered guides, holding permanent territories. Strife among the guides over territories was sometimes violent, despite state efforts to mediate disputes. Native and non-Native subsistence hunters within the region resented the increases of sport hunting (Hunt 1996:207).

More established guides like Conkle, Ellis, DeHart and Hancock felt competition from what they considered the newcomers and the more aviation-based guides. Conflicts soon developed. The old-style horse-based guides felt that airplane guiding was changing the nature of the business and that the new type of clientele was only interested in getting in, bagging a trophy, and getting out, instead of appreciating the wilderness experience. They felt their old hunting areas were being encroached upon and saw a decline in the animal populations, especially in sheep (Murphy and Dean 1978).

The areas where Bud first conducted his guided hunts were relatively un hunted, but within a few years increasing numbers of other guides appeared in these areas, also conducting hunts. Soon Alaska's infamous 'aerial hunting period' arrived, when guides with Super Cubs literally combed the finest hunting areas in Alaska from the air, landing their clients near trophy animals. This wasn't ethical hunting, and it disgusted Bud. During the same period many American businessmen got record

book fever; many had never hunted and were not sportsmen. The ‘in’ thing was to hunt in Alaska and bag a trophy that was large enough to be recorded in the Boone and Crockett *Records of North American Big Game*. These businessmen-hunters (they weren’t sportsmen) wanted a fast hunt—a quick flight into the wilderness, a quick shot or two, and then they wanted to leave. The ethical and leisurely foot hunts that Bud conducted in which enjoyment of the wilderness, pleasure at seeing game and carefully selecting a suitable trophy, with a lot of yarning around the campfire, was foreign to these hunters.

Trails that Bud blazed high in the Wrangell Mountains suddenly became well-used byways with a new type of machine—all terrain vehicles (ATV’s). These inexpensive, noisy little things could go almost anywhere, and they did. As a result, Bud found it difficult to guide his clients in his old areas—the hit-and-run guides and roaring ATV’s gave the hunts a feel of down-town Fairbanks. The kind of hunters Bud guided wanted a wilderness experience, and Tanada Lake and environs began to be less and less a wilderness with all such “progress.”

While all this was going on, to escape the “quickie” hunts and to get beyond the reach of the ubiquitous ATV’s, Bud started flying clients into lakes far back in the Nutzotin Range—a branch of the Wrangell Mountains. One, Wolf Lake, was quite small; it took confidence and experience to land and take off from it, especially with a crosswind, or with no wind and a heavy load (Conkle and Rearden 1991:273-274).

As hunting became more competitive and regulated, and the animal populations declined, Bud Conkle sold Tanada Lake Lodge and permanently moved his hunting operation to a base camp at Wolf Lake where clients were flown in, stayed in canvas wall tents, and again used horses to get farther into the backcountry and mountains. LeNora Conkle explains Bud’s motivation behind the change:

Bud came in one day after returning from the sheep hills, to inform me he was getting tired of the competition from some of the Anchorage based pilot-guides crowding the areas where he had his camps and hunters set out. He was seriously thinking of moving over into the Nutzotin Range, a branch of the Wrangells, where he had been flying his moose and bear hunters the past two seasons. This particular day had him about as upset as I have ever seen him. Two Super Cubs flying together had deliberately buzzed the rams away from his hunters. Those two clients camps were on a lake at the base of the mountain they had climbed and almost reached the Dall rams they would shoot. But had his special descriptive words to describe the unethical pilots who over booked clients and were not particular where they set them out to hunt, even if there were other hunters in the same area. Bud was considered a fair chase guide and outfitter. He knew who those pilots were but left them for the Fish and Game agents to control.

“Every year it’s getting harder and harder for my clients to get good trophies the way those pilots wholesale the game” he said.

After twenty years of hunting in the Wrangells, Bud Conkle informs me he is planning to buy horses and set up his hunting camps on the small lake close to the Snag River at the base of the Nutzotin mountain (Conkle 2000:68-69).

Bud Conkle’s operation at Wolf Lake was different from Tanada Lake. At Tanada Lake, they had a lodge where clients were flown in and then they used pack horses to reach spike camps near the base of the mountain from where they would hike to where the sheep were.

Bud built a sturdy log cabin and high cache at Wolf Lake. An even further change came when we bought saddle and packhorses and started using them to guide hunters into the nearby mountains. The grass grew lush around Wolf Lake, and during the hunting season the horses were content here, staked out at intervals along the shore. Tents were pitched to house our clients, guides, and horse wranglers (Conkle and Rearden 1991:275).

Some guides felt that the numbers of sheep were being affected by a change in management practices. They believed that in the earlier days, the guides were able to manage the stock because they self-regulated the amount, size, age, and gender of animals they harvested. Many considered themselves good observers and felt they had a better sense of the resource than the game managers since they were in closer contact with the animal populations on a regular basis. For instance, Urban Rahoi indicated there were no sheep from Chisana to the Robertson River when he came to the area in 1950, and that he witnessed another large sheep decline in 1954 (Rahoi 2014). The feeling was that since they depended upon the availability of sheep for their livelihood, they would not do anything to overhunt or threaten the population. This is similar to an often expressed Native perspective of only taking what you need so that the population remains sustainable. Or as Urban Rahoi says about his hunting area, “this is a farm and if you take care of the crop, you’ll have more business then” (Rahoi 2014).

There is no scientific documentation of early sheep populations to know whether this self-regulation was effective. Research in the late 1970s did attribute a decline in sheep to overharvesting (Murphy and Dean 1978), but by this time, the level of guided hunting had increased significantly. What is clear is that when there was less sport hunting, which meant fewer hunters, fewer sheep were taken. The guides also felt that the increased focus on trophies and the taking of only large rams was affecting the genetic makeup of the population so that only smaller ones were being reproduced.

The guides worked for many years to get a law passed to have a minimum of a full curl for maximum production rather than a maximum trophy, which was what Fish & Game was geared to. The guides wanted a full curl minimum and the state wanted three quarter curl. So there was a conflict there. Eventually, they did pass the full curl law, which certainly helped the conservation. There were guides out there who were overharvesting and they could do it because of the three quarter curl minimum. With the full curl, they couldn’t take as many animals because there weren’t as many of that size. The full curl rams are the older animals, so it allowed the sheep to mature and breed. You also need the older experienced sheep for things like leading the herd to the best areas to feed. All of this keeps the population up (Knutson 2016).

Yakutat Tlingit hunter Ray Sensmeier similarly values allowing large, strong animals to mature and breed, and expresses concern that these are very often the animals targeted by guides:

They were guides for bear and goats and get ten thousand dollars apiece for killing those animals. They always take the biggest and the strongest which is something we never did. The biggest and the strongest carry the most powerful genes, so they used to fight for the right to mate and the strongest one would mate. But when you kill the biggest and the strongest, then the ones that wouldn’t normally mate, maybe they have injuries or maybe they’re not fast enough to keep up with the herd, or whatever, they get to mate. And so the offspring you know might carry those characteristics. And they do carry those characteristics of the father and eventually the herd gets smaller because of that (Sensmeier quoted in Deur et al. 2015:164).

Michael Lappen wrote in his master's thesis on the history of conservation and development management planning in the Wrangell-St. Elias region about two types of guides that had distinct value systems and treated the resources differently.

Most resident guides belonged to the group that established themselves in the region and maintained a proprietary interest by selectively harvesting game for the hunting groups. They knew the resources better than the game managers. Conversely, the Wrangells also harbored the "rover" guide, who indiscriminately "mined" the wildlife without regard for future use. As the number of guides increased vying for the limited resources, both groups resorted to disputes and confrontations for territorial rights (Lappen 1984:115).

Conflict among the guides was sometimes violent. It might escalate to obstructing access to another guide's airstrip so he could not reach his hunting area (Ibid), or attempts to force an airplane down (Green 2016).

Pilots out of Anchorage were gleaning the sheep. We didn't like them. We had all kinds of names for them. They'd have sheep waiting for their customers. One was a very well known name and Fish and Game always had an eye on him, but every time he got caught he'd have a special lawyer. Bud just wouldn't tolerate that kind of thing. He was always threatening to shoot him down (Conkle 2010).

Not only was there strife among guides and sport hunters, but Native and non-Native subsistence hunters within the region felt the impacts from an increase in sport hunting (Hunt 1996:207). Native subsistence was the dominate use of resources in what would become the park area, but there was also a long history of non-Native subsistence activities. Since Lieutenant Henry Allen explored the region in 1885, miners and homesteaders settled in the area and supplemented their livelihoods by hunting, fishing and trapping. In the last thirty to forty years, non-Native subsistence users have tended toward the "back-to-the-land" or anti-urban mentality with a desire for personal freedom and returning to a more simple way of life (Lappen 1984:117).

Poaching by recreational hunters, and even professional outfitters, is said to be a problem along the Wrangell-St. Elias coast today... Traditional subsistence opportunities are said to have been undermined by competition from hunting guides, who have accessed these lands since before the creation of the park.

In this context, trophy hunters were said to be a modest but persistent problem—outsiders, sometimes with charter guides, taking only the head and antlers of the largest moose, for example, leaving the rest of the body to rot – a phenomenon that interviewees found unpardonably inconsistent with traditional protocols for the area (Deur et al. 2015:172-173).

Taking only the head and antlers of a moose and not salvaging the meat also is something that is illegal according to Alaska hunting regulations.

Another change in the guiding business was with clients and the cost of hunting trips. While the cost of a fly-in trip went down and became more affordable just after World War II, compared to a month-long pack trip, the current price of a fly-in sheep hunt runs in the tens of thousands of dollars. The cost includes the flight, the camping equipment, meals, the hunting permit fee, ammunition, and the guide's salary. Such a trip is out of reach for most average middle class people, thus returning to the old days of rich clients. As Kirk Ellis explains:

The clients have changed over the years. Originally, you had the regular hunter that was a guy that was a farmer or whatever who hunted on the weekends, that saved up his money and went to Alaska to hunt. He was just a regular ol' good old guy. Nowadays, what we end up with is that we have so many rules and so much overhead, that we have to charge more. This make our prices are so high that now we've ended up with extremely wealthy clients. And some of them can be hard to deal with. They're spoiled. But some of them are good people. They worked all their life to get enough money to come hunting, but it's just that now they're too old. You've got a person that's sixty-five years old that wants to kill sheep. And that's when it can get really get hard. I had one guy last year with cancer who really wanted to kill a sheep, but he could barely walk a half mile. So when you start getting into competition with all the other people out there, and you have this old guy that you're trying to get game for, it really gets tough in a real big hurry. But those are the type of changes in the clientele that you're starting to see (K. Ellis 1993).

Kirk Ellis was not the only one unhappy with these changes in the clientele and their desire for trophies instead of enjoying the wilderness experience of a hunt. As noted earlier, this was one of the reasons Wilson Justin stopped guiding (Justin 2015).

CHANGES IN SPORT HUNTING MANAGEMENT

With the increased use of airplanes, more hunters coming in for shorter trips, and changes in attitudes about hunting, the 1960s were a turbulent time for Alaska's guiding industry. "Getting a trophy animal. Getting the largest one that they could find. Trying to kill the most mature, oldest best looking animal" seemed to be the dominant view (Knutson 2016). There was a lot more sheep hunting in the Wrangell Mountains than in the past, and so a lot more competition among hunters. "From 1967 through 1976, the Wrangells supported 29% of the harvest of Dall sheep in Alaska. ...Sixty-eight of the top 200 listings in the Boone and Crockett Club records were from the Wrangell Mountains" (Murphy and Dean 1978:27). Most of those taking the trophies were guided nonresidents flown in by plane. "Forty-two percent of all trophy sized rams (with horns 40 inches or longer) were taken from the Wrangells" (Ibid:30). By 1973, 62 percent of Alaska's registered guides were licensed to hunt in this region (Shaine et al. 1973:49). The State of Alaska attempted to alleviate some of this competition for game and the conflict between guides. They instituted stricter guide license requirements. As Chisana guide Terry Overly has explained:

Guide laws were very liberal when I started guiding hunters in 1959. Caribou and moose were the first animals I guided hunters to. This was when I knew that I wanted to become a real Alaskan Big Game Guide. Acquiring an Assistant Guide License in those days was very simple. The cost was \$10.00 and it looked very much like an old drive-in meal ticket, where a cute young girl would come out to the car and take your order. All you needed to receive your Assistant Guide license was to have a driver's license (*picture was not required at that time*) and someone of stature that knew you and Bang-0, you were an Assistant Guide. You know what? Some of those Assistant Guides from so long ago, from those liberal years, are Master Guides now and have been loyal to Alaska and their gild [sic] for all these years (Overly 2014).

And Exclusive Guide Areas were assigned by the Board of Game that allowed a guide exclusive access to certain places where they could hunt without competition from other guides. Guides were able to request the areas they wanted.

Alaskans didn't like the new type of guide, and the legislature responded by creating a guide board that soon made major changes in the profession of guiding. Each guide was assigned one or more exclusive guiding areas, and unethical hit-and-run guides were no longer free to roam the entire state in search of easy pickings. A regulation that prohibited hunting on the same day that a hunter was airborne was enacted by the board of game, controlling the misuse of airplanes in hunting (Conkle and Rearden 1991:274).

In 1988, the Alaska Supreme Court deemed the Exclusive Guide Areas unconstitutional under the state's doctrine of equal access to fish and game for common use. Today, guides must obtain permits from the State of Alaska to guide in specific Guide Use Areas (GUA). They may apply to guide in a maximum of three GUAs.

Guides pay fees to, and must have signed agreements with, relevant land managers prior to applying for a GUA permit where they wish to guide. Permits are often limited to specific species. Some land managers (through limited concessions) restrict the number of guides that may hunt in a specific area, or the overall number of hunts each year, to assure game sustainability and quality hunts (McDowell Group 2014:9).

For guides in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, the other problem occurred when first the Wrangell-St. Elias National Monument was established in 1978, and then when the national park and preserve were established in 1980. Many of their previously used hunting areas became federally protected lands and were closed to sport hunting.

Sport hunting was the major recreational activity in the Alaska portion of the Wrangell-Saint Elias complex through 1978. Establishment of the national monument closed these lands to sport hunting, but under the newly created park and preserve status, sport hunting is allowed in the preserve but not in the park. ...Through 1978, close to 30% of all sheep taken in the state came from here. ...An extensive guiding industry has developed in the Wrangell, Saint Elias and Chugach mountains with more than 50 guides working the area, at least part-time, and most concentrating on sheep (Henning et al. 1981:124).

The 4.2-million acres of national preserve lands were open to sport hunting, with the boundaries specifically set in reference to known Dall sheep territory. There was sport hunting for other species (fly-in hunters for caribou from the Mentasta and Chisana herds; moose hunting along roads; moose on the Malaspina Glacier forelands; and guided hunts for brown bears near the Malaspina Glacier), but they were less hunted than sheep (Ibid:125). With sport hunting not allowed on lands designated as national park, some hunting guides were put out of business, since they could no longer hunt where they had previously and all the other use areas were occupied. As LeNora Conkle remarked, "The National Park Service is well known for its underhanded ways of eliminating hunting in 'their' parks. They especially want all guides and outfitters out of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park" (Conkle 1997:209).

SPORT HUNTING AND THE PARK

With the establishment of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve in 1980, the state's existing Exclusive Guide Areas were grandfathered into the park's concession system because only those guides could provide hunting services in those areas (Bleakley 2002:219). Given the Alaska

Supreme Court's 1988 decision striking down the state's Exclusive Guide Area system, WRST had to develop its own program for hunting access within the Wrangell-St. Elias National Preserve. The park established Exclusive Guide Areas in accordance with the federal Concessions Policy Act that allowed guides to utilize their existing commercial property or obtain Incidental Business Permits if they were operators without fixed commercial facilities (Ibid:220 & 226). This "temporary" program ran until 1993. It was replaced with a system of seventeen guide areas that limit the number of clients that can be taken into each, as well as the number of animals harvested (Ibid:220-223).

Some sport hunting guides were unintentionally put out of business in 1980 when WRST was established. The areas in which they had been guiding were now within the national park boundaries where sport hunting was not allowed. These included Bill Ellis who had lived in the Wrangell Mountains since 1954, Don DeHart who had been based in Slana since the late 1950s/early 1960s, Frank Pease, a 29-year Alaska resident operating in the area for a decade, and Craig Johnson. The result was extreme for some as is evident in what an unidentified guide told a pair of visiting researchers in 1981:

The Park Service has cut my guiding by eighty percent and my flying by forty percent. The closure has strained our finances and put us in a real bind. I've built my business trying to be honest and I am not about to let Carter make a crook out of me, so I abide by a law that I don't like. It hurts my family. It is really frustrating. There's hunters and guides out there right now and the Park Service is not arresting them. I am abiding by the law and being hurt for doing it. If they're going to have these laws, why aren't they enforcing them? I am just hurting myself by being honest and sticking to a principle. The fact that we chose to live up here and have ideas and a way of life were not considered at all by "them" and that's what really upsets me the most (Defenderfer and Walkinshaw 1981:38).

Or as Mary Frances DeHart explains what happened to her when the park was established and she lost access to their hunting areas:

It basically put me out of business completely. When that is your only full-time business, you don't have the money to do anything else either. I lost everything. I had to sell the horses. I did get the contract for the post office in 1977, but I had to build a building. I owned this property, so the only thing I could do was to figure out okay how can you make a living with the property that is here. I was taking a chance that hopefully with the Park that there would be a few people coming with campers and the new motorhomes that had just become the in-thing. That they would want a place to park. So I set up this camping area along with our lodge. And then there's my artwork. It just takes a little bit of everything in order to make a living. The only choice I had was to redesign everything so that I could make a living here. Being self-employed all your life in this area wasn't easy (DeHart 2016).

Others, like Howard Knutson, could have opted to guide sport hunters in the newly designated national preserve, but chose not to. He had been hunting during the time when he was free to go anywhere and do whatever he liked, and had enjoyed this lifestyle. The areas where he did most of his hunting had now been designated as national park and off limits to hunting. As he explained, switching to the preserve would have meant a new area and there were already other hunters there:

I really didn't want the bother, the hassle with the Park Service. I just felt that they were a big waste and I just didn't feel the need to deal with them. I guess you might say

I am anti-government. I was offered permits, but I was in enough disagreement with the Park Service that I didn't want to deal with them, so I didn't. I didn't have to. I had other means to make a living. I had been a commercial fisherman since 1969, and so timewise you can fish all summer, go hunting in the fall, and so you can do both. Not that I was against having a Park, but I was against not being able to hunt in the Park because the animals were available for harvest and there is some of the best hunting in the world and we suddenly got locked out of it. Actually, most of the Preserve doesn't provide sheep hunting. There is other hunting, but not sheep hunting and I am really not interested in killing any other big animal (Knutson 2016).

Although the Conkles had been leading hunting trips into the Wrangell Mountains since the 1950s, they were not directly affected by park establishment. They had previously sold Tanada Lake Lodge and just recently sold their horses and cabins at Wolf Lake to Doc and Phoebe Taylor of Grizzly Lake Ranch so they were not using park or preserve areas. Bud was using his exclusive guiding area in the Chugach Mountains, a place he called "Shangri-La." However, when asked about it years later, LeNora Conkle remained bitter about changes that resulted from park establishment:

Wolf Lake is located within the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve and Doc can't sell his investments where he now hunts, nor will his sons be able to take over the business and guide hunts there. As I understand it, Doc is limited to the number of horses he can put on the nonrenewable grazing lease we also turned over to him. There are a limited number of hunters he's allowed each hunting season. The insurance required to hunt in the Preserve is outrageously expensive. So, he is working for... what? His own pleasure? Well, he can do that on his own time, without the hard work involved in outfitting for big game hunts with horses and airplanes (Conkle 1997:209).

For those who were able to continue guiding or shift to a new area, there were other complaints, mainly about regulations. As Kelly Bay, a McCarthy pilot and hunting guide who lost about a quarter of his income when he was no longer able to take clients to some of his favored areas, said, "The park's impact was mostly psychological. It is the idea of living with fairly strict rules compared with what we had before" (Bleakley 2002:42).

Most guides who were able to continue their operations within the preserve cooperated and tried to adhere to the new NPS regulations. However, some did not. Some worked in the area without the required permit or authorization. Some were charged with trespass for using cabins they had been told to abandon. Some constructed trails and used ATVs in areas where this was not allowed (Ibid:225). Others, like Urban Raho, who was able to continue using his area around Ptarmigan Lake within the preserve boundaries, were just plain frustrated by the increase in regulations enforced by the NPS: "I get upset a little bit because we are letting somebody way over there in places like Washington D.C. that don't know nothing about anything here make the rules. I want to get the control back to these people here in the local area" (Raho 2014). Raho is not alone in his severe criticism of the National Park Service.

Chisana inholders, like guide Terry Overly, were especially vocal critics. Although unwilling to identify any specific regulation that significantly hurt him, Overly claimed that his freedom had been "gradually eroded" by the National Park Service's presence. He and neighbors voiced numerous complaints, including the need to obtain a concession permit for trespass cabins; potential limits on grazing; guide fees based

on gross revenue; threats to mining; restrictions on ATV use; and the placement of the park's radio repeaters (Bleakley 2002:42).

Some outfitters, like the Ellis family in Nabesna, were able to shift to areas within the preserve and continue sport hunt guiding. Kirk and Cole Ellis, along with others like Gary Green of McCarthy Air, also remained in business by shifting to other types of activities, such as flying-in and guiding recreational users like backpackers, river rafters, and mountain climbers, and providing flight-seeing opportunities for short-term visitors. But folks like LeNora Conkle who had lived and hunted in the area for fifty years saw it differently, "Unfortunately, the National Park Service's policies to steal the land from the honest hunter will survive both Bud and I, and hunting, especially the hunting areas in Wrangell/St. Elias National Park, will never again be the way it was in our changing Alaska" (Conkle 1997:207). The concession and permit policy for guides and outfitters within WRST has continued to be adjusted since its establishment in the 1990s. Local business owners find it hard to keep up with what they consider to be a complicated and constantly changing system, and remain frustrated by all the regulations which they feel limit their lifestyle.

Guides in other areas surrounding Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve faced similar situations. For example, John Latham, who lives in Yakutat, got his guiding license in 1972 and started guiding seasonally in the spring and fall for a friend. It was mostly bear hunts within Yakutat Bay and salmon fishing on the Situk and Italo Rivers. John liked Yakutat and in 1975 settled in the community and started his own sport hunting and fishing guiding business. Around 1977, he got a permit to hunt within the boundaries of what is now Glacier Bay National Park. Similar to the guides in the Wrangell Mountains, John's activity was impacted by ANILCA, albeit in a different national park. "And then in 1980 under the Carter administration, then the park was extended and the areas that I'd been hunting I could no longer hunt. Adjustments were made to some degree and we ended up in the Park Preserve, which is actually bordered by the Doame River" (J. & F. Latham 1995). While John has led hunting trips in other parts of Alaska besides around Yakutat, such as near McGrath, or on Kodiak Island for bears, it is unclear how much of his guiding activity has occurred within what is now Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. Nevertheless, he expresses some of the same frustrations about regulations as have other guides:

We operate on five different land entities, which is a real challenge for anybody with a PhD probably. Because I know I have a hell of a time with it. Everybody has different rules and rulings. I mean, even the different federal agencies have different permits and different schedule fees and what you can do and what you can't do. We operate on Cook Inlet Regional Corporation land, State land, BLM land, US Forest Service and Park Service. And we'd like to simplify things a little bit, but due to the guide-law changes in the state several years ago, we've really had a hard time. In the next couple of years, we expect to not be guiding big game in the interior anymore. The seasons have gotten so short, the pressures by population and by, I would say ATVs, has changed our hunting areas considerably (Ibid).

And similar to the other guides, the Lathams found ways to diversify when they lost access to some of their traditional hunting grounds and to avoid being solely reliant upon hunting for their income. "We specialize in small parties of hunters and fishermen, with the future looking to expand to birdwatching and some non-consumptive uses, which we really enjoy. And I think as a diversification from the hunting, it's probably not a bad idea the way things are changing in this state" (Ibid). In 1992, they opened a bed-and-breakfast (The Blue Heron Inn), which, like the Conkle, Ellis, and McNutt families did, they also use to house their guiding clients before and after their time in the field. As Fran Latham, John's wife, said in 1995:

We gradually built it up by word of mouth. We don't advertise except in the phone book. And we've loved it ever since. It's a nice combination to the hunting and the fishing. It goes well. Some people here are just having breakfast with us, doing their own activities on their own, and the other people we'll be guiding (Ibid).

Some residents of the Wrangell-St. Elias area have felt competition from guided sport hunting, as well as frustration with NPS management (Hunt 1996:207). For example, Eric and Nancy Larson, who have a home in Chisana where they spend part of each year, have commented that through the years they have seen fewer and fewer sheep and they have to travel farther into the hills to hunt. They attribute the population decline to the increase in guided sport hunting, and they worry that local hunters like themselves might not be allowed to enter the hunting areas that are designated for the guides (Larson 1998). Sport hunting guides can only operate in the Guide Use Areas for which they have a concession contract, but the general public is not excluded from hunting there (Bleakley 2002:219). Eric Larson mentioned another difference between him and sport hunting guides that he felt put him at a disadvantage: some guides use horses for sport hunting trips, while owning and keeping horses is too costly and impractical for individual residents (Larson 1998).

FOR THE LOVE OF A LIFESTYLE

Guiding is a unique lifestyle that is both challenging and rewarding. It is not an easy job or a way to get rich quick. It requires hard work, exceptional skill, and knowledge of the country and wildlife. But it allows you the freedom to be your own boss, to spend time in the outdoors and with wildlife, to be challenged and face your potential as a human being, to get paid for an activity you love, and for many it is a chance to live in a beautiful location. The desire to live this way is what ties together the generations of guides who have called the Wrangell-St. Elias area home. Although each of the guides has their own style of trips and preferred hunting areas, and each treats their clients differently, they share a common attitude and character. LeNora Conkle observes:

The excitement of the hunt, the challenge of man against the elements, machismo, and competition spirit had much to do with their attitudes and motives. All these pilots/guides whom I've known, personally impressed me with an aura of successful endurance. I would describe these men as persons with intense individualism, innovation, and audacity (Conkle 1997:206).

For all these guides and outfitters, the most important thing is to be able to continue this lifestyle – that the rules and regulations do not put them out of business and that there continue to be wildlife that can be harvested. As Cole Ellis explained,

When the game's gone, the guides are gone. You can't stay in here. You say, we'll take mountain climbers or take this or take that. Well, we probably can, but it's quite a change, 'cause you got to run bigger volume, many more people. And in the guide industry, we only need to run so many people. We only work like three months out of the year, which is great for us. But you go handling a lot of people, you got a lot more risks. A lot more, you know, just a lot more work.

And that makes us all sad, here. Us guides. Because we use the animals and they've been our way of life and then they've made our living for us and it's been good here. A really good life. Really enjoyed it. But I don't want to be the one to shoot the last sheep either, you know. I want 'em here for the kids to see and everything else. And by having the park, what I understood that's what was supposed to happen. We were

supposed to have moose, caribou, sheep, bear, squirrel, everything here for all the kids to see. Well, by not maintaining it, you know, and controlling it, it's not going to work (C. & L. Ellis 1993).

In addition to all this, to make a living as a professional guide or outfitter you need to be willing to do all sorts of other jobs. You need to be creative in finding ways to add to your income and in thinking ahead so as to see new opportunities as they arise. Frank and Sue Entsminger on the Tok Cut-Off Highway have been hunting and guiding in the area since the late 1970s and are a good current example of doing a variety of activities and using a mixed economic strategy in order to continue living in a place they love. As Sue says:

You have to figure out how to make a livin' to stay here. It's pretty tough sometimes. We figured it out. I guess when people tell me that they have to leave to get a job, you just have to say what is my priority? Do I want to leave my subsistence lifestyle and live an Anchorage lifestyle? Or do I want to figure out how I can make it out here? (F. & S. Entsminger 2015).

Like their predecessors, Frank and Sue Entsminger came to the Wrangell-St. Elias area because they wanted to live there, not because a job or family or some other thing brought them. They sought out and chose to buy property along the Tok Cut-Off, because Frank "liked to be in the mountains and closer to the wildlife and whatnot, so that's when we decided to start looking around for property in the mountain area" (Ibid). In 1977, they purchased the property from Adeline Dempsey. A man by the name of Harry Ivan Neilson had originally proved up on the place, which at the time was a 90-acre trade and manufacturing site, and built a cabin on it. Frank moved his taxidermy business down from Fairbanks and as Sue explains, "Living here gave us the opportunity to have a little more time to hunt for ourselves. Living here, we were our own boss and we didn't have to be in the shop all the time. So we just spent most of the time hunting" (Ibid).

For the Entsmingers, guiding has been a family affair. First, Frank came to Alaska in the 1960s, got an assistant guide license, and guided in the Brooks Range as well as for Howard Knutson out of Chitina. When they moved to the Tok Cut-Off, their son Matt worked for four years after he graduated high school for Paul and Donna Claus of Ultima Thule Lodge on the Upper Chitina River, and then got his registered guide license and learned to fly an airplane. Frank and Sue realized that guiding provided a steady way to provide a little bit of income. By 1994, Sue was helping Matt guide trips and got her assistant guide license, and by 2001 qualified for her registered guide license. As Frank said:

Matt needed to figure out a way to make a living out in the woods, so he decided to do some guiding and commercial fishing. I didn't really want to be a guide per se, but just kept my assistant guide license and helped the family business out. Helped Matt out with his guide operation (Ibid).

But all of this was not enough. Early on, Frank continued his taxidermy business to help bring in more income. Frank and Sue both trapped and Sue sewed fur hats and mitts that she sold in Anchorage and Fairbanks. Sue and Matt fished commercially in Bristol Bay and Norton Sound. And Frank became a bronze sculptor.

As long-term and well established residents, Frank and Sue have a love for and deep commitment to their land-based lifestyle and the people and communities around WRST. This devotion has manifested itself in their participation in the fish and game and hunting management structure of the area to try to make changes from within the system. Being both subsistence and sport hunting

users, they have each served on local State of Alaska Fish and Game Advisory Committees, a Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (RAC), and WRST's Subsistence Resource Commission (SRC). Sue also was a member of the State of Alaska's Board of Game.

People like the Entsmingers, the Conkles, the Ellis family, the DeHarts, Terry Overly, the Lathams, Gary Green, and the Claus family have found their place in and around Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. They have lived off what the land provided both in their own subsistence activities and in making a living by providing access to wildlife for outside hunters. This is their home. Being hunting guides and residents of the Chitina valley, Nabesna, Tok, Chisana, or Yakutat is imbedded deep in their souls. It is who they are. They cannot imagine living anyplace else. They work hard and do whatever it takes to be able to stay. This is part of the appeal: living a life of extreme challenges where you also reap high rewards and experience times of great pleasure and joy.

Endnotes

¹ Reckord, 1983a; Case, Martha F. (1986). *Wild Resource Use in Northway, Alaska*. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence Technical Paper No. 132. Fairbanks, AK; Mills and Firman 1986; Halpin, Libby. (1987). *Living off the Land: Contemporary Subsistence in Tetlin, Alaska*. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence Technical Paper No. 149. Fairbanks, AK; Alaska Department of Fish and Game (1994). *Documentation of Traditional and Subsistence Access in The Wrangell-St. Elias National Park And Preserve: A Review of Existing Source Materials*. ADF&G, ANILCA Coordination Program Anchorage, AK; Haynes and Walker 1995; Bleakley 2002; Haynes and Simeone 2007; Kukkonen and Zimpelman 2012; La Vine et al. 2013; La Vine and Zimpelman 2014; Deur et al. 2015; Sill et al. 2017.

² McGuire describes these men and spells Brown's first name Jimmie (McGuire 1921:32-35). Subsequent authors, such as Burnham 1925 and Bleakley 2006 have spelled it as Jimmy. To be consistent, I have used Jimmie in keeping with the first appearance of his name.

³ Anderton died in Seattle in March 1961 (Bleakley 2006:3).

⁴ Salmon fishing was most significant along the coastline at Point Manby, near the Sitkagi Bluffs, branching inland via waterways such as Esker Stream, Sudden Stream, the Spoon River and Yahrtse River, all of which are within the boundaries of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (Deur et al. 2015:150).

⁵ For more about Bud and LeNora Conkle, see Conkle and Rearden 1990; Conkle and Rearden 1991; and Conkle 1993, 1997, 2000.

⁶ Bringing in horses is discussed in oral history interviews with LeNora Conkle (1993), Gloria McNutt (2015), and Urban Raho (2014).

⁷ For more about Harold Gillam, Merritt D. "Kirk" Kirkpatrick, Merle "Mudhole" Smith, and Bob Reeve and their contributions to aviation in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, see Ringsmuth 2015. For more about these men and history of Alaska aviation, see Bruder, Gerry. *Heroes of the Horizon: Flying Adventures of Alaska's Legendary Bush Pilots* (Graphic Arts Books, 1991); Cohen, Stan. *Flying Beats Work; the Story of Reeve Aleutian Airways* (Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1988); Day, Beth. *Glacier Pilot: The Story of Bob Reeve and the Flyers Who Pushed Back Alaska's Air Frontiers* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1957); Griese, Arnold. *Bush Pilot: Early Alaska Aviator Harold Gillam, Sr. Lucky or Legend?* (Anchorage, AK: Publication Consultants, 2005; Janson, Lone E. *Mudhole Smith: Alaska Flier* (Anchorage, AK: Alaska Northwest Publishing Company, 1981); Levi, Steven C. *Cowboys of the Sky: The Story of the Alaska's Bush Pilots* (Anchorage, AK: Publications Consultants, 2008); Potter, Jean. *The Flying North* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1945) and *Flying Frontiersmen* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1956); Serling, Robert J. *Character & Characters: The Spirit of Alaska Airlines* (Seattle, WA:

Documentary Media LLC, 2008); Stevens, Robert W. *Alaska Aviation History* (Des Moines: Polynyas Press, 1990); Tippets, John M. *Hearts of Courage: The Gillam Plane Crash and the Amazing True Story of Survival in the Frozen Wilderness of Alaska* (Anchorage, AK: Publication Consultants, 2008); Tordoff, Dirk. *Mercy Pilot: The Joe Crosson Story* (Kenmore, WA: Epicenter Press, 2002); Wachel, Pat. *Oscar Winchell: Alaska's Flying Cowboy* (Minneapolis, MN: T.S. Denison & Company, Inc., 1967).

⁸ Urban's construction projects at Ptarmigan Lake have not been without controversy now that his property is surrounded by NPS lands and falls under their rules and regulations. He has had to obtain permits for his runway repair and expansion work. And the NPS has objected to his movement of gravel on what he claims is his own property (Rahoi 2014).

⁹ Despite this agreement on the airstrip, Urban Rahoi continued to experience conflict with the National Park Service. For example, in 1998, he was accused of unlawfully removing gravel from federal land at Francis Creek, and eventually paid a fine for the infraction (Bleakley 2002:75).

CHAPTER 6 A HOMESTEADER'S LIFE

Some individuals live on homesteads, alone or in small groups scattered throughout the region. In the Wrangells most of these groups are clustered along the Chitina-McCarthy and Nabesna roads, and in the Dan Creek-May Creek area. Guiding, trapping, and prospecting provide some income for many of these residents. A few near Strelna farm marginal agricultural land. Others work outside the region in seasonal jobs, and still others have no discernable means of income. The very few people living in remote areas of the Saint Elias range follow a subsistence lifestyle. All of these people have one trait in common, a high degree of independence and a desire to be free of government restraint (Henning et al. 1981:132).

LAND OWNERSHIP

The history of land ownership in and around Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve is a critical part of the story of permanent settlement and connections between residents and the park. The current patchwork of private, federal, state, and Native owned lands is the result of a long political conflict that has resulted in a complicated management regime. This has been written about elsewhere, so it will not be repeated here (Lappen 1984; Bleakley 2002; Allan 2010; and Higgins 2015). Suffice it to say that the legacy of this struggle is that when the park was established there were private lands within its boundaries, for example homesteads, trade and manufacturing sites, patented mining claims, Native allotments, Native corporation lands, and state lands, some of which were later subdivided and sold. Some of these lands have been occupied by residents and some are for development purposes alone. Despite the establishment of the park, these parcels have remained non-federal land. In addition to occupied private lands within the park, people who rely on resources within the park have homesteaded and live on private property outside, but near the park, in places like Kenny Lake and Slana.

Some of the first non-Native people to carve out a permanent home for themselves in what is now Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve were prospectors and related businessmen who did not have enough money to leave after the end of one of the gold or copper rushes or had fallen in love with the rugged lifestyle and the wild and open country and did not wish to return to "civilization." They just wanted a piece of land on which to build a home and live out their days in peace and solitude relying on hunting, fishing, trapping and gardening for their sustenance. While some of these men owned their mining claims where they could settle down to a permanent life, many did not. An unpatented mining claim allowed them to mine and profit from the minerals they found, but they did not own the land or have a right to sell it. This made it difficult to do much with the claim after it was mined out. In this early period of non-Native occupation, besides mining claims there was not much in terms of private property ownership. As in most frontiers, if you wanted to occupy land, you cleared it and you built a structure on it to mark it as yours. There was little recognition of buying a parcel of land from a previous owner or that Alaska Natives or the federal government actually owned the ground before you arrived.

The federal Homestead Act of 1862 provided opportunity for private land ownership in Alaska. Specifically, it granted title to up to 160 acres (1/4 section) of undeveloped public land to individuals. Alaskans were restricted to only 80 acres (Naske and Slotnick 1979:78). The Act required that once a claim was filed, the applicant had five years to develop the property and "prove up on it" to gain full title of ownership. On May 14, 1898, a provision for trade and manufacturing sites was added to the Homestead Act. The law allowed for the purchase of up to 80 acres of public land as a trade and manufacturing site for \$2.50/acre with occupancy required for no less than five months each year.



Kenny Lake Roadhouse on the Chitina to Fairbanks Trail, circa 1930. Alaska State Library, Skinner Foundation Photograph Collection, Alaska Steamship Company, ASL-P44-06-145.

for three years in order to be able to purchase it (US Statutes 1899:413). Alaskans were quick to file homestead claims on federal public land, including in the Wrangell-St. Elias area. Not all applicants were successful at accomplishing their dreams of making a life in the wilderness, but many were. The Homestead Act was repealed by Congress in 1976, except in Alaska where homestead claims continued for another ten years.¹ In September 1983, the Bureau of Land Management opened up 10,250 acres of public land bordering the northwestern corner of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (near Slana) for homesteading. Once again, there was a rush to occupy these remote homestead lots which brought in a wave of newcomers, some of whom were viewed by the locals as “unprepared and inexperienced.”

EARLY DAYS OF HOMESTEADING

When the Valdez-Eagle Trail and later the Richardson Highway were the main transportation routes through the Copper River, Nabesna and Upper Tanana regions, roadhouses were a welcome addition. Visitors stopped in for a warm fire, a hot meal, and a comfortable bed for the night. Residents gathered there to get their mail, trade furs for supplies, grab a whiskey and a home-cooked meal, and to socialize, dance, and catch up on all the latest gossip. Especially in the winter, a visit to the roadhouse was a welcome change from the loneliness and hard work of life out on the trapline or



Successful garden crop, U.S. Telegraph Station, Copper Center, circa 1910. Falcon Joslin Papers, UAF-1979-41-77, Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

in the confines of a small and dark cabin. In places like Gulkana, Gakona, and Copper Center, the community coalesced around the roadhouse (Huddleston 1993; Sundt 1993; Gallaher and Gallaher 2004). These early roadhouse proprietors might be considered the first homesteaders in the area, since they put down roots by clearing land, building structures, and establishing a business. The prospectors, traders and trappers were more transient. They might just pass through on the trail, or stay for a season. Some stayed, but usually were soon moving on to follow the commerce, or to see where their luck or passion would take them.

The Copper Center Roadhouse, established in 1898 by Andrew Holman, was the first roadhouse and store site in the Copper River valley. A new lodge building was built on site in 1932 by Florence Barnes and taken over in 1948 by George and Florence Ashby (Hunt 1996:198). That roadhouse building burned down in May 2012. An article about the fire in the *Valdez Star* newspaper stated that the first roadhouse building was constructed in 1896 and had been owned by the Huddleston family since the 1940s (Dickman 2012).

The Sourdough Lodge near Gulkana was built between 1903 and 1905 and was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1978, at the time being the oldest continuously-operating roadhouse still in its original building. The lodge burned down in 1992.²

The Gakona Lodge was started in 1904 by James (Jim) Doyle who was one of the first homesteaders in the Copper River valley, arriving in Gakona in 1902. In addition to running the lodge,

Doyle cleared 80 acres, raised grain for horses, grew vegetables, and built timber buildings (home, lodge, barn, icehouse, warehouse, blacksmith shop) (Hunt 1996:196). During its heyday, the Gakona Lodge served as a community center, where trappers and traders would come in from the trail for a chance to socialize, grab a hot meal, and have a drink. The lodge has since changed ownership numerous times through the years, but has remained a regional social hub. In 1912, fur trader Mike Johnson took over the Gakona Lodge and started a store. In 1918, J.M. Elmer, manager of the Slate Creek Mining Company bought the lodge. In 1925, Arne Sundt took over the Gakona Lodge and in 1934 added a liquor store. Arne Sundt died in 1946, but his wife Henra took over, and she and her son ran it until 1975 (Ibid). "In 1976, Jerry and Barbara Strang purchased the Lodge from Henra Sundt. In 2004, the Lodge was purchased from the Strangs by Valori and Greg Marshall, and in 2014, the lodge was purchased by Clif and Rebecca Potter" (Gakona Lodge 2016). The lodge still remains in business today and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Another early homesteader was John McCrary, who reached Alaska in 1902 and filed a claim on a homestead adjacent to the Valdez Trail about a mile north of the Klutina River. He soon established a log roadhouse at the site and had a large garden to feed his family and guests. When that structure burned in 1909, he built the frame-constructed Copper Center Hotel, which burned about 1920 (Bleakley 2006:78-79). The McCrary family continued to live in the Copper River valley, finding various ways to make a living just like everyone else, including trapping and fox farming.³ John McCrary died in August 1940 and was buried in Copper Center (Ibid).

But what most would consider real homesteading occurred farther off the beaten track. For instance, miners homesteaded at May Creek (Bleakley 2002:201), and there were homesteads along the Edgerton Highway and the McCarthy Road. "Lands have been cleared for agriculture, particularly at Strelna, Chokosna, and Long Lake. Today, probably fewer than 15 families live along the entire road" (Henning et al. 1981:40). According to Holly Reckord's 1983 report, *That's The Way We Live: Subsistence in the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve*:

Homesteaders farmed near the highway right-of-way between Chitina and McCarthy and supplied vegetables, some grains, and chickens to the people in McCarthy, Kennicott, and Chitina. They tried also with much difficulty to provide dairy products, but the grizzly bears attacked the cows grazing beside the salmon-filled creeks in the summer. Unfortunately this researcher has never seen any literature written about the life styles led by the homesteaders living along the railroad. The meager information already given is from stories told by local whites who heard of or saw these farms in operation in the 1920s and 1930s. It is said that these farms were never very successful, due in part to the unsuccessful battle with the wilderness. Not only did bears attack the livestock, but small fur-bearing carnivores attacked the fowl and rabbits, and hare and moose grazed freely in the gardens. Undoubtedly, the farmer tried to get those animals out of his garden and hen house and served them up from time to time as stew on his table or sold them to the local fur trader (Reckord 1983a:179).

In 1917, Frank A. Iverson homesteaded just west of McCarthy. He switched from being a foreman on construction of the railway and living in Chitina to being a farmer. He operated the McCarthy Dairy during the 1920s and was one of a number of local farmers growing grain, vegetables, and hay to serve the McCarthy and Kennicott communities. "Although the farmland was good, the industry was too small and too isolated to profit from selling produce anywhere else but the immediate vicinity, and this put a natural cap on expansion" (Kirchhoff 1993:60). Other farmers included Olav Holtet near McCarthy and Al Fagerberg on Ed Mullins' old homestead at Long Lake (Bleakley 2006:55 & 58).

According to Bleakley, “Ed Mullins homesteaded between Oscar Anderson’s property and Long Lake in 1918, and later sold his property to Alvin Fagerberg who sold vegetables to Kennecott. Unfortunately, Fagerberg never obtained title, so it was vacant when acquired by Cliff Collins in 1961” (Ibid:88).

Inger Jensen Ricci, who was born in Kennecott in 1918 and lived there until 1932, recalls traveling out to Long Lake in the summer for camping, fishing, and visiting “Old George Flowers, a black man who lived alone in an old log cabin downstream,” who entertained them with his guitar and showed them the best fishing holes (Ricci 1981:88). In comparison, Larry Clarke experienced life in the Chitina River valley in the 1940s following the close of the railway and mine when there were far fewer people and life was much different than during the halcyon days of the “Kennecott Kids.”

In the short ten years after the Kennecott Copper Mine and its attendant, Copper River and Northwestern Railway, went out of business the country reclaimed much of the serenity and natural way which had been there before 1900, when only a few Indians lived in this vast area. The few, remaining white people who still lived in Chitina and McCarthy continued to talk about the mine and the railroad. But, by the time we came on the scene, the survivors had seemingly long since gotten over any despair or recriminations and were engrossed in just being a part of the remote lifestyle. It was a way of living scaled down from the hustling 1930’s and was mostly just fine for the people still living there (Clarke 2002:103).

No matter when they came or where they settled, a desire to escape and live a life of freedom is a common theme among homesteaders in the Wrangell-St. Elias area. David West, who homesteaded near Slana in 1984, describes the motivation of his cohort of homesteaders, but it clearly applies to everyone.



Left to right: Captain Osborne, Richard Osborne, George Flowers, Ingeborg Jensen, Inger Jensen, Jerene Osborne at George Flowers' cabin at the Lakina River, circa 1926. Courtesy of Dick Anderson.

I think Slana's really diverse. There's a lot of different people from different places that have all come to this area. And for the love of the mountains and nature and the hunting and fishing. The solitude. So we're all individuals. We're all different and from different places, but we seem to have a common denominator that we all like the surroundings of Slana. You know, the mountains and just the freedom and the ability to live our lives how we want to without really rubbing too much with society. Within the laws, but not having the restrictions like you would in a regular city or rural area. I think that's what draws people to this area. It's pretty peaceful. You've got the Park right there. It's 21,000 square miles, I believe. And that's our backyard. And then in the frontyard there's the Mentasta Mountains. So we got a lot of room to play and to hunt and get out and hike or whatever you want to do. So I think that's kind of a common denominator of the community. You know, is just living in the wilderness, but still having access to civilization (West 2012).

HOMESTEADING AT KENNY LAKE

Raising crops or grain is not usually associated with Alaska, especially the interior with its long cold and dark winters. However, history has proven otherwise. The summer growing season may be short-lived but its nearly 24-hour days provide a constant light that nurtures intense growth. The



John McCrary's oat field, Copper Center, circa 1910. P.S. Hunt, Crary-Henderson Collection; Anchorage Museum, Gift of Ken Hinchey, B1962.001a.432.



Piles of hay in the field at Gakona Ranch, owned by James Fish, located at the confluence of the Gakona and Copper Rivers, circa 1910. Charles Bunnell Collection, Agriculture Vertical File, UAF-1958-1026-855, Archives, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.



Herd of angora goats at the C C M & T Company Stable in Copper Center, circa 1900. P.S. Hunt, Crary-Henderson Collection; Anchorage Museum, Gift of Ken Hinchey, B1962.001a.149.



Sheldon Auto Stage leaving Chitina for Fairbanks, March 23, 1915. Courtesy of Bleakley Collection, Makawao, Hawaii.

families who settled the Matanuska Valley Colony in 1935 as part of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration's New Deal resettlement plan were able to clear land and sustain themselves from their own hand-worked fields and crops in a location just forty-five miles northeast of Anchorage (Miller 1975; Lively 1995; Hegener 2014). Gardeners in Fairbanks and Palmer are famous for the oversized, record-breaking vegetables entered in state fair contests. People from Seward to Dillingham to Wiseman have raised small house gardens to supplement their food supply, since fresh vegetables are either expensive or hard to get. The Copper River valley was no exception. Kenny Lake on the Edgerton Highway across the Copper River from the western boundary of what is now Wrangell-St. Elias National Park proved a successful spot for traditional homesteaders who wanted not only to carve out a quiet rural life for themselves but also to farm and raise animals. The soils were more productive, and together with the longer growing season of the slightly more temperate climate in the low-elevation valley, it became quite a popular destination.

After the Copper River and Northwestern Railway shut down in 1938, access into interior parts of the Copper River and Chitina River valleys became more difficult. Chitina had been a railroad hub town with freight brought in from Cordova on the coast. It was the closest crossroads to the Kenny Lake homesteads with both passengers and freight constantly moving through. Without the railroad, homesteaders who lived past Chitina relied upon the poor old Valdez Trail wagon road from Valdez or airplanes for delivery of supplies, which was much more costly due to longer routes. For an occupational group that made little money, this was difficult to afford. When the road was improved and developed into the Richardson Highway, life in the upper Copper River valley began to get easier. The regular truck traffic to and from both Valdez and Fairbanks helped reduce the cost of freight, and provided a distribution artery for the farm products to leave the farm and earn the farmer some money. This export network expanded with the development of the Alaska and Glenn Highways in the 1940s and better and better methods of transportation after World War II.

By the 1950s, large agricultural farm homesteads began to become popular in the Kenny Lake area. Bob Petties and his wife, Laverne, were one of the earliest of this group. Bob cleared eighty acres and planned to raise barley. They were a hard-working family, but could not make the farm profitable. They were not able to harvest the barley in time to pay off their debts. The Petties owed about \$2,500 so lost the homestead. Around that time 160-acre homesteads were valued at about \$2,000, but when the Petties' property was sold about five years later, it went for \$40,000 (Lightwood 1993). That would have been a big profit for Petties, but unfortunately, "He put the work in on it, but he didn't make anything on it. The real estate man made the money" (Ibid).

Tom Ross was another early homesteader in the Kenny Lake area and he started about 1959 or 1960. For \$2,000, he bought out his neighbor, Joe DeMonde, who had not done much to develop his 160-acre parcel (Ibid). Roy and Mary Beth Hooper were another early homesteading family in Kenny Lake, filing claim to 124 acres along Willow Lake in 1961. Roy worked for the Alaska Highway Department while simultaneously clearing the land and trying to raise crops. After struggling for about a decade, they eventually gave up farming and Roy's job with the state sustained them. As Roy Hooper explained:

We had to clear twenty acres on our property and seed it with productive crop. Unfortunately, our land was located in the lee of Willow Mountain, and areas just ten miles out from us— either to the north or south—would get almost twice the rain in summer. So we found out, after being there for two or three years, that wasn't ideal farming country (R. Hooper quoted in Brown and Gates 2012:119).

Despite their difficulties, the Hoopers did make an important contribution to the community. As Roy explained, Mary Beth's training as a nurse proved invaluable:

A lot of people would come to our place because they needed medical help and we had one of the few telephones around. Mary Beth would either patch them up – using medical supplies she always kept on hand – and send them along, or else she'd call the Cross Road Medical Center, which is located roughly thirty miles to the north in Glennallen – and tell them that a patient was headed their way (Ibid).

Sam and Marian Lightwood were the next to give farming in the valley a try. Sam Lightwood grew up in Pennsylvania, came to Alaska in 1952, and got a Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) teaching job in Hooper Bay. He explains how he first heard about Kenny Lake:

We knew a few Quakers in Fairbanks, and we were visiting out there, and they were talking about a family who was homesteading in Kenny Lake. It was the pit of poverty, you might say. It was in the threat of the red scare and the scare of atomic warfare. And they were looking for a place where they could hide out and avoid atomic annihilation. Well, I wasn't quite so much of an escapist, but they had a great big geologic map of Alaska that showed favorable soils for agriculture. It was pointed out that where they lived in Kenny Lake, the soils were like the soils of Pennsylvania. It was a clay with high calcium on top of layers of limestone. This makes for fertile farm land. Well, they didn't have their program put together pretty well and they ran out of money. I met them a little later and he told me where his homestead had been up here (Lower Tonsina) and that he had had to leave. ...They were totally inept because of their failure to figure out how to live in an age where it required money. And that was the end of them (Lightwood 2012).

Although they had been told it was a farming area, Marian Lightwood was disappointed when they first drove to Kenny Lake in 1961. As she told Kenny Lake student, Kristi Knutson, in an interview:

I was used to these huge farms in Eastern Washington, crops many of which were well over a thousand acres. ...I was used to that. ...All the way down I'm looking...farms...farms?...Trees! Farms? No fields...maybe there was one. There were very few because that's when the first homesteaders were just beginning to prove up and obtain their fields (K. Knutson n.d.).

The Lightwoods ended up staking claim to land in Kenny Lake in February 1962, and with the required ingenuity of multi-tasking homestead activities with wage earning endeavors raised a family and made it their life-long home.⁴ Sam taught school, worked as a janitor, hauled water, and ran the local newspaper. Marian taught at the Kenny Lake School for fifteen years. They also became very active in the community and helped with various projects to improve life there, such as construction of a community well, a community center, and the library.

There was still open land, so I homesteaded here. This piece of ground was available. I chose this piece of land because it was on the lake. Having grown up in Pennsylvania, even though it's not a dry state, I realized the importance of water to any and every farm. So I was very lucky to find that it had a lakeshore, although I didn't know the lake didn't have any stream coming into it. It was a stagnant, scummy pond. But we filed on it, and came up here to prove up. Which meant living here for three years, building a cabin or house, and cultivating some of the land.

There's great potential here. But I was never a person organized well enough or concentrated enough to meet the potential that was here. But I got my land cleared and I had a herd of animals. We made our own fences. And we made them in such a way that the moose would jump over them, rather than dragging the wire away. A moose will just charge into a wire fence and pull the wire off the posts. Nevertheless, the cows got out quite frequently, because between the moose and the bears, they'd break down the fences. There wasn't enough return because of my management and not being knowledgeable enough about farming. I learned it by doing and bought equipment from Bill Sutton. It usually worked pretty well, except he never believed in grease. Literally. He was a farmer from the Midwest and was very disciplined. He knew what kind of equipment to buy, and he always had a good line of equipment. Better than most of us. And was very successful in having crops to market. His farm was pretty prosperous, while the rest of us got sidetracked much by other projects, like building the library, advocating for improved schools, and getting the community well up and running.

We were pretty much organic. We had our cow. Milk and cottage cheese and I sold fresh eggs. \$1.00 a dozen. And I sold produce. And every now and then, after the herd got a little bit bigger, I'd sell an animal to somebody. I'd say, "If you want it dead, you can pay me another forty bucks and I'll shoot it for ya. And gut it out. Then you can take the carcass and age it and cut it up on your own." That worked pretty good. It avoided the necessity of having it done in the slaughterhouse. It wasn't legal, but there wasn't any alternative. I also sold raw milk. It wasn't legal. It was called "bootleg milk." But there was no creamery. We had no electricity. It was just that primitive (Lightwood 2012).

Living on a homestead and raising animals, hay, and a vegetable garden does not make you rich. As Marian Lightwood has said, “The hardest part of raising a family on the homestead was no money” (M. Lightwood quoted in K. Knutson n.d.). Although, they had no money, Marian sewed, so she made her children’s clothes, and they had food. Their milking cow provided butter, milk, ice cream, and cream. They had meat from the cows and what Sam hunted. Although his harvest was not always substantial. Marian recalls how their daughter, Julie, clearly remembers a particular time when Sam had left to drive their truck back from Washington and the remaining family ate a rabbit that their cat brought in (Ibid). There were also times when they ate squirrels. They also had fresh vegetables from their garden. In the early days, they did not have a way to freeze the vegetables, but they could can them. “There’s nothing worse than canned broccoli or canned cauliflower. *Eww*. But we ate it because we needed vegetables” (Ibid).

Outside employment was needed to help support these homestead families. For some families, the husband did seasonal work either locally on road construction or that took him away for a period on things like commercial fishing, construction, or the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. Others tried to support themselves with odd jobs in the area. Sam Lightwood explains the dilemma his family was in:

We were faced with a limited way of making a living. It was impossible to decently have the man in the family away making a living while the woman is on the homestead. There’s just too much physical work, too many complications of living that a woman has too much of a trouble handling. It was just too much work. Most of the families here had a husband who was here and there and off and on again, and it wasn’t too bad. So when a position was opened for a teacher at the school, I urged Marian to take it and I said, “I’ll be the house-husband” (Lightwood 1993).

In the 1960s, there was new found interest in homesteading when “back-to-the-landers” disenchanted with their government and the confines of civilization came looking for their own last frontier.

People homesteaded if they really were interested in farming, and a number of them were. The attraction was the good soil. It was a calcareous clay underlaying loess soil that the wind had blown up from the river valleys of the Chitina and the Copper River. It was very good potential for the production of barley, but our season is a little short. The soil conservation sub-district obtained equipment to lease out. They had a Cat and discs and a welder and some other equipment that the homesteaders could rent at a nominal rate to get their fields cleared (Lightwood 1993).

Keith Murray of Kenny Lake was one of these folks looking for a new path. He moved to Alaska in 1968, arriving as a single parent. He acquired homestead property from the BLM and initially lived in a teepee until he built a cabin the following year.

When I first came here, I was a subsistence farmer in my mind. And not only legally was I a homesteader, I was spiritually and emotionally that way a farmer. Whereas the letter of the law was just part of it. But I’ve also fulfilled the spiritual part of the homestead requirements, because I really was a homesteader. But I was forty years getting my head set to where I could do it. I was afraid of putting up money for someplace I couldn’t buy. And this was an experiment that I won. I was able to make a gamble and I won in that sense. And when I came out here, I was called an “entry man.” This is the procedure of homesteading. You enter the place and put pegs around

at the corners, and describe the place on a paper. And then they give you a very elegant looking paper. And it says, "To you and your assigns, forever." Well, I thought that was a beautiful word, "forever" (Murray 2012)

As has been made clear, making a living on a homestead in the Copper River valley is not easy. As a relative newcomer and trying to learn from the experiences of his predecessors and neighbors, Keith Murray decided to do something a little bit different. He took a risk and introduced domestic goats to his homestead, thus his local nickname "Goat Man." As he explains:

I had a bunch of cows with my dad and all. And when I got up here, well, I realized that cows are not as good as goats. Ten goats give more milk than their equal weight of cow. Farmers hate goats because they're too wasteful. But this is an area where there's willows, and cows don't eat willows as much as goats do. So it was an ideal place for goats. In fact, worldwide there's more goat milk consumed than there is cow's milk. Because a pasture that's good for cows is pretty limited. But goats have a much wider type of area that they can be in. In fact, the Bible says if you want to be a farmer you go up to the mountains and you catch the little kids and you domesticate 'em. It was the system that was used for thousands of years (Ibid).

Keith's experiment paid off. His goats have survived and his farm has prospered. Often being willing to try something new is exactly how progress is made. Having this type of courage and ingenuity is essential for a frontier lifestyle. Building on the experiences of those who came before with the addition of your own modern twist to build your own unique and satisfying lifestyle.

Michael Swisher was another homesteader on the Edgerton Road during this period who sought out new ideas. Like the others, he farmed his acreage for hay and worked a mixture of jobs as cook, custodian, special education teacher, and weather recorder for the National Weather Service, but then turned to beekeeping. While honey was produced in other parts of Alaska, it had not been tried before in the Copper River valley. To Michael's surprise, it proved successful.

I got into beekeeping after I started studying some of the flowers. I looked around several places in the States to see what they were doing. And I found a few farmers up in the Fairbanks area that were doing beekeeping, and some of them down the Matanuska were doing beekeeping. I thought, "Well, let's give it a try." In the beginning, I had as little as two colonies, and I've had as many as twenty. Any honey I can produce, the valley itself will take it. The stores will just glom right onto it. There's probably six or eight different stores that would be glad to have any amount of it (Swisher 1993).

In contrast to Keith Murray and Michael Swisher, who specifically sought out a farming lifestyle, Bill Etchells fell into his homestead life at Kenny Lake a bit by accident. He came to the Wrangell Mountains in the early 1960s as a sport hunting guide, but quit the business as he saw a reduction in hunting opportunities and a shift in the attitude of clients towards more trophy hunting. In a 1993 oral history interview, Bill explains how he ended up with a homestead and how he tries to make a living off of it:

I got into the guiding industry, guiding business, and had to have horses. And I had to have a home for the horses and I had to have grass for the horses, so I bought this old homestead here. And then when I quit guiding, I started doing log building and some farming here. Clearing more land and planting more grass

and sellin' hay. But financially it hasn't worked out very good because I've just barely survived here. Well, we always have a problem with the right weather for harvesting, but I think my land, it averages too dry to really be good for farming here. And there's absolutely no way we can irrigate. Well, we could get water from, say, the Tonsina River, but the problem is you'd have to go over Native land. I hate being dependent just on one crop, but that's the best we've got here for makin' money so that's what I'm stickin' with. I sell some hay to individuals and sometimes towards spring I sell some to the feed store in Palmer. And I feed a lot of it to horses that I board here. Boarding horses has worked out pretty good, because there's always some grades of hay that I can't sell and I can feed it to the horses. During the winter, I'm tied down here just feeding horses hay twice a day and grain once a day. And I have a stallion in the shed that I have to water him twice a day, too.

When I'm haying I usually have from two to four guys that I hire to help. I always like to have as big of a crew as I can get, but never know from day-to-day how many I can get. There's a lot of people here that you could hire to do work like, say, driving a truck or something, but [when] it comes to hard work buckin' bales, they're not interested. I can only pay six dollars an hour, too. If I could pay twice that it would be easier to get somebody to work, too (Etchells 1993).

Of course, doing the hard work of clearing the land, building a house, nurturing the soil, feeding the animals, and planting and harvesting the crops is only part of what it means to make a living as a homesteader. Selling your product is a key piece of the money-making puzzle. Given the distances in Alaska and the high cost of fuel and freight, finding a profitable market for your crop could be challenging. Michael Swisher was lucky to find local interest in his honey. With hay, many used the hay themselves, but some like Michael Swisher sold it to individuals like Sam Lightwood who had cows, Bill Etchells who kept horses, and Keith Murray who raised goats (Swisher 1993) or Bill Etchells who also sold to individuals as well as to a feed store in Palmer.

Bill Etchells has worked diligently to eke out a living on poor ground in a cold and unpredictable climate. He admits that it has meant hard work and often giving up things in order to live on a small income. But he has found it a fulfilling lifestyle, in that he has been able to live in the shadow of the spectacular Wrangell Mountains, a place he loves, and still be able to get out and enjoy the vast country that attracted him there as a guide in the first place. The question is whether farming really is a viable option for the future in the Kenny Lake area. As Bill explains:

The one problem right now here at Kenny Lake with the farming is there's no way we can expand the farms or other people start farming here. If you want to expand a little, the land is really too high priced, because there's so little land in private hands it keeps the price up to where it's not economical to buy it for farming. That situation would be completely different if the land hadn't been given to the Natives, and if the federal government had kept the Homestead Act going. You know, where other people could've homesteaded land here. There's all kinds of young people in the country here now that would love to have a piece of land, just enough so they could have one or two horses and have some pasture for them. But they can't afford to buy enough land (Etchells 1993).

Sam Lightwood had other thoughts about the limitations on farming around Kenny Lake and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve:

People who live here, who have an acre, we would like to get twenty acres. We'd like to get fifty acres. We'd like to get a hundred acres. We want to farm. But the residents here can't get the land. They are competing against the people from Fairbanks and Anchorage who have no interest at all, except as a possibility for speculation. So that's a management problem. It doesn't have much to do with the Park Service, except that until the Park came in there that land was also available, and people were homesteading. There's a lot of people that live out in Strelna. And the whole McCarthy and Chitina River area is probably as good for agriculture as this is. There were some old homesteads in there and I guess they're still privately held, but then you're close to the Park. The land has skyrocketed in value. Nobody can buy it for anything except for a recreational site (Lightwood 1993).

Despite these challenges, Bill Etchells was optimistic about the future:

I think in Alaska the time will come when there can be a lot more people farming and maybe making a good living at it. But we're gonna have to have a market out of the state for a lot of stuff. And that means that the grain or whatever has got to sell for more than it's selling for now in relation to what it costs you to raise it. I don't think I'll live to see the day, but I think the day will come when people will be makin' a living farming here (Etchells 1993).

Although the names and faces have changed since the first homesteaders at Kenny Lake, people continue to try their hand at farming in the area. They sell and distribute produce from their gardens, grain from their fields, and domestic livestock that they have fed and slaughtered. One of the more recent additions to the agricultural sector of the Kenny Lake region was the faith-based settlement of Sapa founded in 1975 by members who felt a calling to live off the land and labor in service to God. At its peak, Sapa Christian Center consisted of about 100 residents with 320 acres of farmland and productive greenhouses where they grew food for themselves (supplemented by salmon and wild game), as well as sold flowers and vegetables to the surrounding area (La Vine and Zimpelman 2014:19). They also earned income through their business, Regal Enterprises, which sold firewood, operated a sawmill, and provided construction services. By 2012, Sapa had lost enough residents moving away for greater economic opportunities (only 21 residents remained in 2013), and access to woodlots was increasingly challenging so by 2013 the greenhouses were shut down and Regal Enterprises was closed. The loss of a local and affordable source of firewood and fresh produce had broad economic impacts for the Copper River basin (Ibid). In 2016, the former Sapa Center was purchased by local residents Jamie Cooley, Jodice Sawyer, and Sam Kramer-Joseph. They envision a sustainable and self-sufficient homestead that also is a place for the community and visitors to come together to learn and grow (Lorenz 2016). They have plans for a wide variety of projects, including organic vegetable production, hay sales, an RV park, cooking classes, learning camps for kids, a lodge, and being a venue for weddings and other events. Their goal also is to help support other local businesses. Keeping a small business going in the limited market of the Copper River basin can be challenging and requires creativity and commitment in order to be successful. Working together is one way that small businesses can help themselves continue to thrive and grow. In 2016, the new owners of Sapa were collaborating with existing Alaska Homestead Services, operated by Jason Esler in McCarthy, to expand his recycling services and be a central sorting and processing center (Ibid).

Kenny Lake continues to thrive as a community of 300 to 400 people with an active school and community organizations (US Census Bureau 2012).⁵ Homesteading in places like Kenny Lake remains a challenging lifestyle, with not many folks being able to live entirely on the proceeds of a



Ranger Thelma Schrank and Bev Goad at the Slana Ranger Station, 1980s. Courtesy National Park Service.

farm anymore.⁶ But it continues to appeal to people who want to get away from the stresses of a nine-to-five job and crowded city life and are attracted to the idea of raising their own food. The frontier myth and romance of wild Alaska continues to draw people north to try their hand at living off the land, whether that be homesteading or hunting.

SLANA SETTLEMENT AREA

Prior to 1983, twelve to fifteen families lived permanently or seasonally along the Nabesna Road on small homesteads and homesites (Reckord 1983a:15). They accessed their homesites either by airplane or road, in addition to snowmachine or dog team in the winter months.

In September 1983, the Bureau of Land Management opened up for homesteading the 10,250 acre North Slana Settlement Area, which bordered the northwestern corner of Wrangell-St. Elias

National Park and Preserve. By the end of 1985, more than 420 people had staked claims (Bleakley 2002:71). “Technically, the settlers at Slana are not ‘homesteaders’ but ‘homesiters’” (Brice 1998:52). On May 26, 1934, the Homestead Act was revised and resulted in the Homesite Act, which authorized the transfer of up to five acres of public land for private residence as long as certain residency requirements were met. After the land was staked and began to be used or improvements made, “This act requires that a habitable house must be placed on the land and residence maintained therein for not less than five months each year for three years” (US DOI BLM n.d.:3). These five acre sites were not free, but were priced far below market value, thereby making it possible for the less well-off to buy their very own piece of Alaska and the Alaskan dream (Brice 1998:52).

The new homesiters at Slana requested permits from the National Park Service for access across park lands to travel to their lots and to harvest local resources, including firewood and house logs. Their requests were denied. “The park denied their requests for access corridors because their property was neither within nor effectively surrounded by the park or preserve. They were not deemed qualified to harvest firewood or house logs either, as they lacked a history of traditional use” (Bleakley 2002:72). Eventually the park did permit an access road across NPS lands into the Four Mile subdivision of homesite lots, in part because doing so allowed them to control how the road was constructed, for example, ensuring that culverts would protect fish habitat (Schrank 2016).

Many of these Slana homesteaders were unprepared for what they found when they arrived in Alaska. They came with a romanticized desire to re-create an old way of life, but did not have the skills, character, or tools to do so.⁷ They knew nothing about actual conditions. “They assumed the land was suitable for farming, that subsistence game could be readily gathered in the area, and that local employment would provide them with some income until their land flourished” (Hunt 1996:196). What they found instead was wet, boggy land with limited resources that required extensive knowledge and effort to acquire, and a place lacking jobs.

The thought of free land is what brought a lot of people here. They just thought that the land was free, and all you got to do is live there and you get it. They weren’t anticipating the hard work and the hardships that go with it. It seemed like most everybody who came out here weren’t prepared for what Alaska had to offer. They didn’t have any winter clothes. They didn’t have a chainsaw or an axe or anything to build their house with. They had no background skills at all for homesteading. They didn’t know how to hunt, they didn’t know how to build a home, didn’t know how to raise a garden. They were really limited in their ability to do the skills that you need for homesteading. A lot of them coming from rural areas or cities had never been to a remote area, and there’s no employment in this area. There were no jobs. You’d have to leave to find a job. And that was a hard thing to do when you’re trying to build your home. And so a lot of them ended up on public assistance for a means of survival while they built their homestead. That eventually ran out, and then most people had to leave and go find a job (West 2012).

Finding themselves unable to live off the land like their turn of the century predecessors, some of the newcomers ended up on welfare and food stamps, and poaching became a problem (Ibid). The program ended in October 1986, but some homesteaders remained in the Slana area. Ten or fifteen families are reported to still be there (Schrank 2016).

Thelma Schrank who has lived in the Nabesna/Slana area since 1972 and has worked for the National Park Service since 1983 described a shift she saw in the community when the new homesiters arrived:

All the old-timers that came in here and homesteaded have died off. And when I say homestead, I mean really homesteaded back in the sixties rather than the homestead area we have out there now that was done in 1984. Different type of people. Ah, not to pigeonhole folks but the old-timers were people that had jobs or had skills and utilized those for whatever. They were working on a pump station or for DOT [Department of Transportation] or whatever, compared to a lot of the folks that are out in the community now that are on some type of public assistance. Or ones that work seasonal jobs during the summer and then collect unemployment in the winter. So they were just completely different folks

In 1984, when they opened it up to homesteading, it was advertised in papers and magazines and Paul Harvey. Come to the Last Frontier, come to Alaska, this is the last homesteading and it is free land. Well, a lot of people that didn't have anything in the places that they lived, whether it be California or Idaho or Wyoming or Texas or New Mexico, wherever, saw this opportunity for free land. And so they came up here and it was like the Grapes of Wrath. I mean, you would see them with the washtub tied on top of the station wagon, dirty kids, and all their belongings piled into the car. And when they would go to the post office on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday or Tuesday and Thursday it started out as, they had all their belongings with them because the people that were their neighbors would steal their stuff. So they came with all their stuff in the car and they went back with all their stuff in the car. A lot of them were on public assistance and there is no bank around here and they couldn't afford to actually drive to Tok or to Glennallen to cash their check and so they cashed it at the post office with money orders (Schrank 2016).

The earlier residents have gotten used to the homesitters who remained, and divisions of the past have settled down.

Out of the 350 filings, there are probably not more than 30 or 40 people that still live out here now. There are a lot of people that got patent to their land, but left because they didn't have a way to get any kind of income and so they moved on. Now it is just pretty much the diehards that have a summer job or they work for the Park Service or they work for DOT or they commercial fish or they work in the hospitality end of things whether it is cleaning rooms or cooking or whatever. The whole dynamics of the neighborhood has changed.

At the beginning, there was animosity amongst everybody and it was more like you stay over there and I will stay over here. It kind of separated the community for a while, but it is like anything else, the community has kind of settled down and there is not that problem anymore. When I came in 1972, everybody here was glad to see you. They would shake your hand and say, "Welcome to the community. Glad to see you." They were accepting, but it was a different time than in 1984. It wasn't a huge influx of people coming in. It was only four of us in my family (Ibid).

Being one those "newcomers" in 1984, David West had his own strategy for acceptance:

I didn't get out and introduce myself to all the local people who had originally been here. There was a real stigma against the homesteaders. People didn't appreciate all the new people coming in. And to avoid any conflict, or whatever, I just stayed at my homestead and did my thing. I didn't want to get involved in any of the conflicts. We just kind of stayed with our own little group and didn't venture out (West 2012).

Despite this level of acceptance, there remains an undertone of disdain for folks who cannot take care of themselves in the harsh world of interior Alaska.

The thing with homesteading the five acres was that you had to live on it five months a year for five years in a habitable dwelling. The first couple of winters, it was really weird what was considered a dwelling. One of the dwellings was a house that was built with bales of hay. That was his little abode. Another gal with kids built one out of a frame covered with Visqueen. It was 25 and 30 degrees below zero and she was living in this Visqueen tent. Another guy who didn't have a lot of smarts, I guess, built a cabin out of creosote telephone poles because they were putting in new underground telephone wires up on the highway and you could have the telephone poles for free. They didn't want you to just take the poles and leave the wire, so you had to take the 15 strands of wire, too. This guy saw a gold mine, so he went and gathered up all these creosote telephone poles and built himself a little cabin. Then when he used his wood stove to heat the cabin, creosote would just run off the logs. I mean he just didn't have any idea of the land that is back there (Schrank 2016).

The traditions of neighbor helping neighbor were important to survival in these remote areas; you knew that the next time it could be you who needed assistance. But after the Slana homesteading where neighbors seemed so thoroughly unprepared these traditions of neighborliness were affected. Some of these newer homesiters did not have the same values of sharing and helping as their predecessors, and remained isolated on their properties. Also, there was less trust between people, and less assurance that your neighbor would have the means or the skills to help when needed (Brice 1998; Schrank 2016).

Not all of the Slana homesteaders failed. Some of them put in the hard work necessary to succeed, found a connection to place that has tied them to the land, and have become part of the diverse community of Slana. In a 2012 oral history interview, David West described his arrival and the early days of the 1980s homesteading efforts:

Me and my wife had just decided that we's [sic] was going to move to Alaska. And we were just going to go find someplace out in the woods, build a cabin and live off the land. Trap and hunt and fish. We went and stopped at Fairbanks at the Forestry Department, 'cause we'd heard that you could get a trapping cabin permit. And they told us that I couldn't do that anymore, but that the BLM had land open in Slana. And in Minchumina. But we didn't have the funding to fly to Minchumina and get set up there. So we went to Anchorage to the BLM office there. Talked to them, and they told us about south Slana. They told us that we should take a gun with us when we go there, because it was kinda wild out there. So then we went ahead and came on up and we staked up some property and stayed. I homesteaded right on Rufus Creek, so we didn't have to drag the water very far. When we first got here, nobody had power. Then people started getting portable generators. I think we got our direct power in 2005.

Part of the conflict was caused because when they opened this for homesteading they didn't provide access. So when somebody made a trail to their house, then other people want to use that trail also. But they'd like to go through your land. But, you know, most people didn't want a trail going through their property. So a lot of people tried to block off the trails, and that caused some friction. There was a lot of people who'd start to develop a site. You know, put a camp there, whatever, get started on it and then they'd leave and go to work. When they'd come back, someone had

overstaked their property and set up another cabin. And so that always caused a feud. It was just a lot of stuff like that. Kind of like, I would imagine, during the Oklahoma land rush. With claim jumpers and sooners and all kind of stuff. It's kind of the same scenario, but in 1984 (West 2012).

While David West remains on his homestead, he admits that it has not always been easy. He has made sacrifices in order to do this, such as having to leave the area for work in order to earn enough income to support the homesteading life. As he explains:

I think probably the worst part about the whole homestead thing for most of the settlers was being to be able to take time to go to work. Because you had to physically be on your property in order to prove up on it. And most everybody who came out here didn't have a nest egg or didn't have a local job. So you'd have to leave the community to go to work. So I would say the first three or four years of being out here was probably the toughest. Until you got your patent on your land. Because if you left for any length of time you could come back and somebody might have overstaked your property, burned your house down, or just ripped you off. Taken anything of value that they could use on their homestead. Or your firewood. We had our firewood all stacked up for the year and we came back and it was seventy below zero when we got back. And expecting to have a stack of firewood there, and it was all gone. So then we were out looking through the woods for firewood to stay warm. Things like that happened. If it don't kill you, it makes you tougher.

We were fortunate. We had skills that we could use that we could go to work for the summer and then come back home. But it was a sacrifice. I was used to working a full-time job, year round, before I came here. I built boats for a living for US Marine Bayliner. And I did that since I was eighteen until I moved up here when I was twenty-four. I also logged. I was doing that before I moved to Alaska. When I got here, not having a job available was kind of a hardship. That first year, I went to Valdez and worked until the end of the fishing season. It was about three weeks. That was long enough for me to qualify to get unemployment. So then we had an income through the whole winter. So we were able to help some other people out who were struggling, too, some. So that was kinda cool. Some people worked together. Other people were more independent and just wanted to do their own thing, or weren't willing to help or share. There was a small group around this area where I live that we kind of tried to work together a little bit. It wasn't like the barn raisings of the Amish. It'd have been nice if it could've been that way, but that isn't how it worked. Unless you're raised that way, people are not that giving. Everybody's kinda got their own agenda. So, it's pretty diverse (West 2012).

David West is not the only one to mention this type of neighborliness. Places like Slana, Kenny Lake, or McCarthy may not be towns in the normal sense of the word as experienced in other parts of the United States with a grid-like pattern of roads, street lights, and side-by-side houses with fenced yards and well-trimmed lawns. However, they are communities. They are places where people meet at a community center, local bar or restaurant, where children go to school, where mail is picked up at the post office. Despite these far-flung homesteaders claiming to crave solitude they have an equal desire for connectedness. Not only do they visit with or help their immediate neighbors, but just as in the old days of roadhouses or trading posts they are willing to drive a long way for a community gathering or a chance to see other people. David West explains what community means in Slana:

When we first got here, well, it was a big event to go to the Post Office. We'd get mail three times a week. Monday, Wednesday and Friday. So people would meet at the Post Office to get their mail and they'd chit chat there. Then we had what we called "Hootenanny." Where people would get together. We'd have like a potluck, and just kinda have a good time. It was at Rusty and Paula Carpenter's house and we'd go over there. A few people would play guitars and Bill Price had a harmonica he could really play. And we'd sing. That was in the early days.

We didn't have telephones back then. So everybody had a CB radio. We'd get on the CBs in the evening and everybody'd be talking back and forth catching up on gossip and making more gossip. That was always fun. But sometimes it'd get you in trouble, because you'd end up saying things maybe you shouldn't. And then you'd have some hurt feelings or whatever you'd have to deal with later. But most of the time it was good fun to communicate back and forth on the CB's.

Then they had Duffy's back then also. There was a bar and restaurant, so people would meet there, also, and hang out. There were probably more single men out here then than there were families. And very few single women that were just doing the homestead by themselves. The majority was single men. And most of those were probably of the age that were Vietnam vets or that era.

When we originally got here it was just all woods. There weren't any trails or nothing. As a community we have built the infrastructure and community corporation, which is our government, so to speak. And the school, we built that. Started out in some trailers and then we eventually got some grants and we got a real school built. And that's kind of been a focal point for the community (Ibid).

Contrary to expectations, it turns out that these homesteading communities in the Wrangell-St. Elias area are more like small towns rather than just a loose conglomeration of people who happen to live off the same road or run into each other on the trail. Although your neighbor might be ten miles down the road instead of across the fence, residents joined together to advocate, raise money, and form community organizations to acquire services they needed, such as electricity, rural mail service, a paved road, or getting a school built. Similar to what happened in Slana occurred elsewhere, such as in Kenny Lake:

I think that type of cooperation was brought in by a couple of the homesteaders. One family in particular was Howard and Fran Kibble. They had lived in Idaho, I believe, and her father had homesteaded in Idaho. And they were used to the idea of getting together to raise money with such things as potluck suppers or dime-a-slice pie socials or other things.

Homesteaders are typical Alaskans in that they believe in doing it themselves, and so the idea of anybody coming along and telling 'em what they're going to do, how they're going to do it, was anathema to them. There was suspicion of the Kenny Lake League, as it was called. There were a lot of things that the homesteaders felt were needed. One was electricity. Another was telephones. Another was rural mail service. Another one was the getting the road paved. And another one was the improvement of the school. All these things were accomplished one by one without too much community opposition, because they were all perceived as benefits (Lightwood 1993).

This cooperative spirit was not unusual. It has been the premise of frontier living throughout Alaska's history. If you found someone out on the trail with a broken sled or starving in a cabin

due to poor hunting or lack of ammunition or supplies, you stopped to help. Yes, people died. They froze to death, they drowned when trying to cross a raging river or by falling through thin ice, they starved, they accidentally shot themselves or were injured in a fall, or were sick and unable to reach medical assistance, but the frontier credo was to help another human being whenever possible. The next time it might be you. This promise continued with the homesteaders of the 1950s and 1960s and remains today among Alaskan outdoor adventurers.

LIFE IN AND AROUND MCCARTHY

A sense of place and connection to community is a common element throughout the region, but perhaps most so in McCarthy. Located at the end of a 60-mile dirt road, butting up against the soaring peaks of the Wrangell Mountains, surrounded by millions of acres of national park land, and separated from civilization by a roaring glacial river, McCarthy relishes its isolation and takes great pride in identifying itself as a special place.

A number of the present residents have chosen to live in the valley because of the opportunity it provides to dwell in magnificent scenery away from many pressures of modern life, while coping with a very harsh natural environment. This opportunity is rare in modern America; its existence contributes to the diversity of our society. One of the great advantages of visiting the valley is the perceived freedom from the continuous interference of rules and regulations over the activities of daily existence. This lack of bureaucratic presence differentiates Alaska from the other states and is much cherished by many Alaskans (Shaine et al. 1973:66).

The town of McCarthy grew out of a 296-acre homestead staked by prospector John Barrett in July 1906. Barrett was born in Texas in 1872 and prospected the Forty Mile and Klondike in the



View of McCarthy from McCarthy Creek, 1914. John Byram Collection. Courtesy of Dick Anderson and the National Park Service.

1890s. He arrived in the Copper Basin in 1906 where he prospected, staked claims that became the Green Butte properties, and established a homestead where McCarthy Creek enters the Kennicott River (Bleakley 2006:7). "As Barrett surveyed the country around the Bonanza Mine, it dawned on him that any railroad built to Bonanza would have to traverse a narrow strip of land between the face of the Kennicott Glacier and the mouth of McCarthy Creek. Barrett decided to claim this land as his own" (Kirchhoff 1993:28). Barrett's friend, John Blomquist, also had a homestead and roadhouse near the base of the Kennicott hill (Ibid:33).⁸ In 1907, the Copper River and Northwestern Railway came through and discovered Barrett had already staked the land they found most desirable for a switching turntable at the end of the line. So Barrett rented the railroad a freight yard from his property (Ibid:29). McCarthy continued to expand and by 1912 was the supply center for the entire Nizina and White River watersheds, and the starting point for prospectors going to the Chisana Gold Rush in 1913.

Harry and Albert Fagerburg were among the first merchants to arrive in the newly forming community of McCarthy. They built a large three-story log building as a roadhouse and store. They also managed the Blackburn Hotel that was later purchased by Oscar Breedman, a Cordova and Chitina hotelier (Ibid:33-36). The consummate businessman, Barrett saw a way to make a profit by creating a townsite from a portion of his property.⁹ The location of the original McCarthy townsite, which later changed its name to Blackburn, is not the same as the current McCarthy (Miller 2011a). The present town of McCarthy grew up during the Chisana Gold Rush, when prospectors exited the train on John Barrett's property where they proceeded to set up tents (Ibid).

Barrett was a sensible man, and decided that the best way to get the squatters off his land, and perhaps make a big profit at the same time, was to create a townsite for them. He hired a mining engineer, and together they surveyed a townsite on the corner of Barrett's homestead that contained the railroad terminal. Barrett named the new town after James McCarthy, a mining friend who had recently drowned in the Tonsina River (Kirchhoff 1993:42).

Barrett offered all of the lots on twenty-five year leases, and once he received patent to his homestead in 1917 he issued deeds to any McCarthy leaseholder who desired one and once they owned property they felt secure in expanding (Ibid:50). "Blackburn's fate was sealed as people found the convenience of the railhead, postal offices and freight easier to deal with and merchants began flocking to the new town site of McCarthy" (Miller 2011a).

Barrett and his wife, Josephine, lived in McCarthy in the summers, where he was an avid gardener along with continuing his mining activities and pursuing an interest in photography. He experimented with different crops and won first place in the 1909 Alaska-Yukon Exposition for his potato crop (Ibid). In 1911, Dora Keen hired Barrett as a packer when she first attempted to scale Mt. Blackburn, and then he was her expedition leader the following year on her second, and successful, climb (Ibid). The Barretts were community minded and were members of numerous civic organizations, including the Commercial Club, the Arctic Brotherhood (which had a performance hall where there was music, dancing, and even a black-faced minstrel show) (Garrett 2017), the Red Cross, and the Armenian Relief Organization during World War I. John Barrett left McCarthy in 1943 and moved to Washington (Bleakley 2006:7).

Kennecott was a company town for the Kennecott Mine where employees lived, supplies were purchased at the company store, and children attended the company school.¹⁰ McCarthy, on the other hand, served the community's recreational needs in the form of bars and prostitution. It was what former pilot Kenny Smith has called "a sin town" (Smith 2016). "Bootlegging was rampant in the area and train engineers had a special whistle sequence as they neared town warning one



Mr. & Mrs. R.L.H Marshall at entrance to their store and gas station in McCarthy, circa 1926-1928. Courtesy of Eleanor Tjosevig and Dick Anderson.



Marshall's store, McCarthy, circa 1926-1928. Courtesy of Eleanor Tjosevig and Dick Anderson.

and all that the law was on board. By the time (a) law enforcement officer entered town it would have been difficult to locate the booze” (Miller 2011a). But McCarthy was more than that. It had regular residents and businesses needed to support a town, such as Walter Harvey who sold lumber, building materials, hardware, feed, and hay. He was born in California in 1867, and arrived in Alaska prior to 1910, when the US census enumerator found him living in Cordova. Although a McCarthy merchant, he also operated a branch store in Chisana during the heyday there (Bleakley 2006:50). Other prominent McCarthy residents at the time included the previously mentioned J.P. “Cap” Hubrick and Andy Taylor who based their guiding and freighting businesses there in the 1920s. Martin HARRAIS and Martin Radovan, already discussed in the mining chapter, prospected remote claims in places like Dan Creek, May Creek, McCarthy Creek, the Nizina River, and Glacier Creek returned to McCarthy to obtain supplies, visit, and take up short-term, seasonal residence there. And there were the previously mentioned schoolteacher Margaret HARRAIS, entrepreneur Kate Kennedy, and shop owner Alvina Schultz.

The Merchants of McCarthy were known as shrewd businessmen and often got the better portion of the miners’ cash. About anything a person desired was available in McCarthy providing one was willing to pay. From female companionship to caviar anything could be had for a price. Because everyone had to pass through McCarthy it was a great location for a sin city. And the good time girls arrived to set up shop. This continued right up to the final days before the railroad pulled out, though on a lesser scale. Many of the women of the line were highly respected in the community and known for their charity work and good deeds. It’s interesting to note that no church was ever established in the early days within the precincts of the town and though many citizens were tee totalers, the bootlegging and still operations remained rampant all through the prohibition years (Miller 2011c).

However, life in McCarthy in the 1910s, ‘20s and ‘30s was typical of other frontier towns of the time.

The hardships of the most mundane daily activities are beyond even our hardest residents today. Take a moment and consider life at our present temperature extremes (today -43F) without insulation, chainsaws, snowmobiles, compact generators, phone/internet and all the little things we take for granted. Horses, dogs, handsaws and kerosene lamps were the conveniences of the day. Conversation, dinner parties, socials, books and sports were the great entertainments through the dark months of winter. And the hardy bunch that made it through the long months of darkness together naturally felt the closeness of a community developing within the first several years of its founding (Miller 2011b).

After the Kennecott Mine shut down and the railroad stopped running in 1938 and the bridge over the Kennicott River washed out in 1943, most residents left and the post office shut down (Kirchhoff 1993:90). According to Kenny Smith, “We had a big fire in McCarthy in November of 1940 which burnt down the entire main section of town” (Smith 2016). The fire “razed much of the town, destroying the Alaska Hotel, the McCarthy Drug Store, and the post office. Mrs. Ben Jackson died in the fire” (Kirchhoff 1993:90). This only added to McCarthy feeling like a ghost town.

It is also a misnomer on many people’s part to promote the idea that McCarthy became a ghost town after the railroad pulled out. This simply is not true. Many people stayed on, this was their home after all. McCarthy has a continuous history of rugged

individuals who enjoyed life in these mountains. Many mining operations also tried their hands in the area after 1938. It was Kennecott Mining Corporation, by then a multinational conglomerate who left the country, not the people (Miller 2011c).

A few people remained in McCarthy, prospectors and trappers still lived out on the creeks and in the valleys, and a few homesteads struggled to survive at Long Lake, Strelna, and Chokosna, but it was a tough way to go (Henning et al. 1981:40). However, the McCarthy area remained relatively isolated and unknown until the 1950s.

Beginning in the later 1950's, a few people rediscovered the area, not for its minerals but for its breathtaking natural setting and for the ever-rarer opportunity it offered to live, not a primitive existence, but a life apart from contemporary rhythm and pace... Gradually the population grew to the present few dozen, most of whom still do not spend the full winters there. There are also a few weekend-only residents who make the long trek from Anchorage as often as they can (Sax 1990: 3-4).

As previously mentioned, Merle K. "Mudhole" Smith helped with this re-discovery by flying tourists into McCarthy to experience frontier mining history (Janson 1981; Kirchhoff 1993; Ringsmuth 2012a; Smith 2016). Inspired by a trip to Knott's Berry Farm in California, Smith figured, "If they're pulling in tourists here, why can't I do the same thing with tourists at McCarthy? It's there already, I don't have to do anything to it" (Janson 1981:115).

The Sourdough Tours commenced in Anchorage, where tourists were loaded onto a DC-3 airliner. From Anchorage the DC-3 flew over the Chugach Mountains, to May Creek, which maintained the only strip long enough to accommodate Smith's DC-3. ...From May Creek, a Model T truck with wooden benches in the back hauled gawking tourists, astonished by the vast beauty of the country, twenty miles down the Alaska Road Commission-built dirt road paralleling the Nizina River to McCarthy. After a "miner's lunch" at the "ghost town," guests spent the afternoon panning for gold in a nearby stream. Tours of McCarthy were also provided. ...On the second day of the Sourdough Tour, visitors made the six mile trip to Kennicott for a picnic and to hike around. Travel between McCarthy and Kennicott took place on the "Kennicott Express" another Model T automobile mounted on railroad wheels. Once there, visitors wandered freely through the industrial buildings... (Ringsmuth 2012a: 83-84).

Smith was business partners with Zack and Delpha Brown who put the visitors up overnight in what they called the McCarthy Lodge, which was the renovated former home of Cap Hubrick (Janson 1981:115-116; Kirchhoff 1993:91-92). Smith saw this tourist venture as a boom for McCarthy and its revitalization: "We had more than seventy people in there one weekend. The town really came alive then, and land values soared. Everybody got interested in McCarthy" (Janson 191:116). Sourdough Tours went on for about five years, until the Kennecott Copper Corporation purchased the abandoned Kennecott Mine and fearing liability and a lawsuit from tourists rummaging around their property and removing artifacts, they posted "No Trespassing" signs (Kirchhoff 1993:92).¹¹ Merle Smith explained that "the people who bought the land didn't like tourists and closed the mine to visitors. We could still travel on the old railroad because the right-of-way had been set aside as a tourist attraction by the Department of the Interior but we couldn't allow the visitors to get off the cars" (Janson 1981:130). Smith did not like the change and shifted his operation to flying tourists to Dawson City instead (Ibid:131-134).

In the early 1960s, the Alaska Department of Highways helped build a primitive roadway along the abandoned rail bed from Chitina to McCarthy, but access was limited. In 1971, the department constructed a new bridge over the Copper River near Chitina, replacing the previous bridge that had not been rebuilt after washing out around 1939. It was now possible to drive to McCarthy, although the road was on the old railroad bed and was rough. Many a tire was flattened by a rogue railroad spike. In 1973, a new bridge was built over the Kennicott River to replace the old one lost in 1943, but the new structure washed out in 1975 and was not rebuilt. This meant to get to McCarthy from the end of the road, you had to pull yourself and all your supplies across the raging Kennicott River on a cable tram and walk the remaining distance. There were a few cars and trucks in town, along with ATVs and snowmachines, that were driven across the frozen river in the winter. This tram system was replaced by a footbridge in 1997. In 2004, Keith Rowland, owner of ROWCON Services in McCarthy, constructed the Kennicott Service Bridge, a private vehicle bridge across the Kennicott River, located approximately ¼ mile downstream from the footbridge. The bridge and approaches are entirely on Rowland's private property, and was privately funded, so is a gated, fee-for-use facility not open to the public (Rowland 2004). Local residents and businesses purchase an annual permit to be able to drive across this bridge. While this access has its detractors who do not want more vehicles and traffic in McCarthy, local business owners appreciate the cost and time saving of being able to haul supplies and fuel into town on a single truck rather than making multiple trips with a handcart across the footbridge (Darish 2016). "Amazingly, in a town where access issues are normally highly controversial, the comments were overwhelmingly supportive. Most residents consider the gated bridge concept to be a positive solution to McCarthy's access and freighting needs" (Rowland 2004).

Slowly, people started to discover McCarthy as a wilderness haven.¹² While it was not exactly homesteading for most, it required similar skills for being able to sustain yourself from the land and finding creative ways to earn money. It was still a mixed subsistence and wage-based lifestyle. People still lived in close connection to the land and the seasons. They spent time in the wilderness like it was their own backyard. For some it was their private playground. Like the Natives who had inhabited the region for generations, these non-Native settlers learned the patterns of the landscape and environment and came to appreciate all that they had to offer, both good and bad. The Wrangell Mountains and the Chitina, Copper, and Nizina Rivers became a part of who they were. Identities were formed around being a wilderness resident.

It is not easy to describe either the people in the McCarthy-Kennicott community or the way of life they lead. Neither fits any of the ordinary stereotypes. It is not a back-to-the-woods movement in any ordinary sense, and the people have no desire to live in primeval conditions or to subsist solely on their own labors. Yet they have no electric service, no telephones, no running water and no road access. They take their water directly out of a nearby creek. Their sanitary facilities are old-fashioned outhouses, and they heat their houses with wood they cut on the mountainside and haul to their homes (Sax 1990:4).

Prior to his death on May 21, 2016, at age 85, Jim Edwards was the oldest resident of McCarthy and is representative of the true old-style homesteader spirit. In 1953, he was living in Cordova and just having learned to fly asked about a good place to go exploring. One day on a recreational flight he landed at Long Lake, decided he liked the valley, and set out to move there. According to an interview with Jim by students at the Kenny Lake School, he worked as a pilot, guide, business owner, and airplane mechanic, but "never had a real paying job." He said the longest job he ever had was for one month and he earned \$1,400, which he proceeded to use to buy an airplane (Gottschalk n.d.). Jim Edwards first lived in an old cabin in McCarthy, but after meeting his wife, Maxine, in 1957, they created a homestead at Swift Creek.¹³ This was during a time when there were few other people living



Jim Edwards taking a lunch break while hiking, circa 1998. Courtesy of the Edwards family.

in the valley and their only access was his airplane. Jim was the perfect man to re-establish rural life near McCarthy. He was tough and determined. In his 20s, he walked the 193.9 miles from McCarthy to Cordova along the abandoned rail track and crossed over raging rivers on hanging cables and the ruins of trestles, and continued to take long wilderness hikes into his 80s. In the winter of 1961, he spent a month bringing fuel, supplies and a 1949 Chevy as a surprise for his wife back over the deteriorating rail bed and collapsed trestles.

Jim believed in doing things for oneself if you could, and was known for his stinginess, recycling, and ingenuity with machinery. He built his own aircraft, assembled a truck he called “Rigor Mortis” with parts recycled from 1930-era vehicles he found left behind in the area, created his own tracked snow vehicle, built a waterwheel to provide electricity at his home, and even built a shed out of piled up old mail-order catalogs (Kizzia 2016). Because of this myriad of skills and talents Jim was able to make a comfortable life and raise a family on his remote homestead. But he chose to live remain there because he cherished the serenity of the wilderness. “I look out there at the mountain, at the glacier, at the forest, and I look at that scene and that’s my church. It feels that way to me. I’m in contact with whatever’s bigger” (J. Edwards quoted in Christian n.d.).

This connection with wilderness is what brought others to McCarthy long after the Edwards had made it their home. Some like the Edwards came to homestead, including Hank Hopper at Long Lake and the Dummier family near Strelna. Others, like Al Gagnon who arrived at May Creek in 1966 to mine and homestead, came in search of fortune. Still others were trying to make a living as prospectors and trappers in a wild setting, or to start small businesses. While others like Curtis and Loy Green, Ben Shaine, and Sally Gibert came in the 1960s and 1970s in search of a place to live life on their own terms away from what they saw as the ugly culture of consumption and materialism.



Zenair airplane built by Jim Edwards at Hidden Lake, circa 1998. Courtesy of the Edwards family.

Originally from Monte Vista, Colorado, Loy and Curtis Green arrived in Valdez on July 4, 1963. That winter they found their way out to Chitina and in the summer of 1967 to McCarthy. During the winters, they were usually in remote cabins up McCarthy Creek or at May Creek. Summers, they frequently were away from the Chitina Valley working, or lived in McCarthy or Chitina. They did some limited prospecting, but otherwise lived off the land hunting and trapping. Loy spent a lot of time reading, thinking about deep philosophical and theological issues, and playing his trumpet. Curtis moved to Oregon in 1987 and Loy stayed in the area into the 1990s.¹⁴ As Curtis Green describes:

World-weary at 23, I was desperate not to lead that life of quiet desperation that Thoreau claimed most men lead. ...I clearly heard the sage of Concord chanting his message to Simplify, Simplify. Visions of a cabin in the woods, a plot of soil to garden, freedom from what seemed to me an oppressive social-order, i.e. rat-race, and time to "Loaf and invite (one's) soul;"[sic] what more could one want? (C. Green 1987:2)

Loy Green had very personal motivations for living in the wilderness:

The most important thing about the Wrangells is that it gives me the time and the freedom to search out answers and God. I've created my own isolation, not because I am a hermit, but because I am interested in further evolving myself to a higher state of consciousness. ...And the Wrangells is the best place to do that (L. Green quoted in Defenderfer and Walkinshaw 1981:47-48).

While the Greens felt deeply connected to the wilderness, Curtis Green was critical of an attempt in the summer of 1970 by some people to create a utopian community in the area:

Over at Spruce Point a 'hippie commune' developed, flourished briefly and died. I have no idea what inspired Fred [Potts] to initiate that particular endeavor, as I can hardly imagine anyone less likely to succeed at such an undertaking. Well, anyway, a small band of long-haired, long-bearded, granny glassed, pigtailed back to nature 'freaks' under the leadership of a prophetic type who called himself Loping Bear, moved in and set up camp. Naturally it was short-lived. Even under the best of circumstances, the commune trip was (is) a tough row to hoe, especially for us spoiled individualistic, egomaniacal Americans (C. Green 1987:19).

No matter the reason, this diversity of people had one thing in common. "They had all consciously selected McCarthy-Kennicott as a place they wanted to live. ...Having come together, the residents had come to a consensus about the kind of living they wanted to do there" (Sax 1990: 5). Some people with close ties to McCarthy chose not to live there, such as Kenny Smith, who spent time in his youth in the 1950s helping with his father's tourist and airplane business and by 1960 was a pilot himself flying in and out of McCarthy and Chitina. The hardship was too great. "I had to make a living, and there is no way to do that in McCarthy. You had to usually leave and then come back" (Smith 2016). Key components for this lifestyle were self-reliance, will power, and hard work. The goal was a life of contentment. As Jeremy Keller, a permaculture farmer who came to McCarthy in 1991, said in an interview with Kenny Lake School student, Amber Lenard:

We didn't like where the world was going so decided to create. We wanted to create what we thought was beautiful. What we thought was beautiful was to live in a quiet sustainable way where you're rooted to a place, you're part of that place, and you love it so much that it becomes your whole life. That vacationing doesn't make sense (Lenard n.d.).

As in other homesteading locations, not everyone who came to McCarthy was successful. Jim Edwards witnessed a long procession of passionate young back-to-the-landers and gung-ho wilderness settlers who came with the best of intentions, but were unprepared for the realities they found. Many did not have the equipment or skills to handle their first vehicle break-down in the middle of nowhere, or know how to find a good supply of firewood to heat their home. Some did not last more than a winter or two. Besides, it was harder to homestead in the traditional sense of the word in McCarthy, compared to other places, such as Strelna inside the park boundaries along the McCarthy Road, or Kenny Lake outside of the park.

This is actually not a good place if you are like a "back to the lander." It is a hard place to hunt. There is not a lot of animal food meat out here really. The moose are not plentiful and there are no caribou here to speak of. There are sheep, but that is a lot of work to get a sheep. And there is no soil in McCarthy. I mean, there is some good farm potential across the river, but like in Kennecott and here there is not a lot of agricultural potential. So it is really a pretty thin landscape out here. But it was just kind of a cool, interesting place that, I think, a lot of it was the buildings. The fact that there were these abandoned buildings and people could just move into them (Gibert 2016).

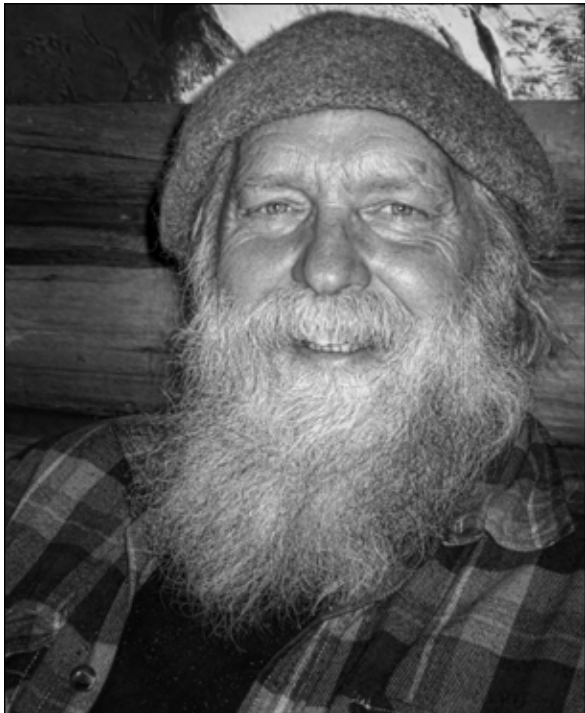
But some people had what it took and were determined to continue. For some this meant having to leave in the winter to earn money and then spend their summers in McCarthy. For example, Ben Shaine who first came to Alaska in 1967, stayed with the Ellis family on the Nabesna Road for a



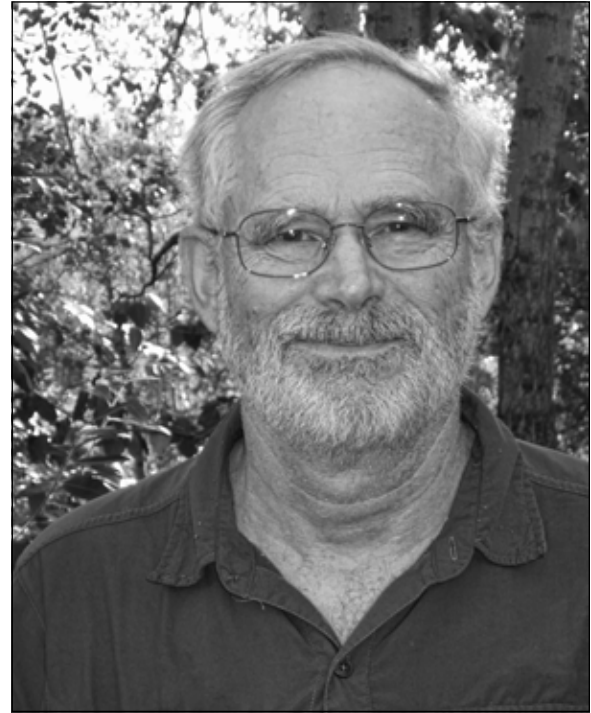
Gary Green, McCarthy, 2016. Photo by Karen Brewster.



Neil Darish, McCarthy, 2016. Photo by Karen Brewster.



Mark Vail, McCarthy, 2016. Photo by Karen Brewster.



Ben Shaine, McCarthy, 2016. Photo by Karen Brewster.



Sally Gibert, McCarthy, 2016. Photo by Karen Brewster.



Bonnie Kenyon, McCarthy, 2016. Photo by Karen Brewster.

time, and started coming to McCarthy in the early 1970s, first as a recreationalist, and then working on Wrangell-St. Elias area related research projects as an environmental studies professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) and the Evergreen State College in Washington. Ben made deep connections with the McCarthy area, having lived one full winter in a cabin at Spruce Point up the Nizina River, and having spent every summer since the late 1970s at his cabin in Kennecott (Shaine 2016). In 1985, he co-founded the Wrangell Mountains Center, which offers a summer program of courses oriented toward the natural, environmental and cultural history of the area, and is also an author.¹⁵

Another example is Sally Gibert who first came to McCarthy in 1973 as a college student from UCSC working as an intern on environmental issues, and fell in love with the place. She applied a different strategy than Ben for remaining connected to McCarthy. She purchased the town's old hardware store building, which now is home to the Wrangell Mountains Center that she helped co-found, and had to find full-time work in Anchorage to pay it off. She spent two winters in McCarthy, but ran out of money and had to return to Anchorage to get a job. She ended up getting married and settling there permanently. Nevertheless, she and her husband have been coming to their cabin in McCarthy for regular weekend trips or longer summer vacations for the past forty years (Gibert 2016). With Anchorage being relatively close, Sally has been able to get to McCarthy more frequently than Ben, although his teaching job allowed him to stay all summer versus her shorter forays. Now, in retirement, they are both able to spend more time in the cabins they love. Despite these seasonal visitations, similar to many in their cohort, Sally and Ben still both consider themselves residents of McCarthy/Kennecott.

Another 1970s era McCarthy pioneer who has made it his permanent home is Gary Green. He came to the Wrangell Mountains in 1973 and built his first cabin in 1975. He has

prospected for gold, trapped, been a pilot and a hunting guide, and since 1988 has operated his own charter flying business, McCarthy Air. As Gary explains:

I was into any outdoor activity that involved hunting, fishing, trapping and a goal of mine was probably to go on a pack train hunting trip in the Wrangell Mountains of Alaska. And so when I got the opportunity to go prospecting, the Wrangells just drew me right in. ...It was the life for me and living out here back then the sense of discovery and exploring this country, the whole Wrangells were abandoned and yet it had such a rich history in mining (G. Green 2016).

Mark Vail, who settled in McCarthy in 1983 when the state opened up home site lots for sale in the Fireweed Mountain Subdivision, is another long-time successful homesteader who represents an older way of life. Ten miles from town and a mile walk in from the road, his house is hidden away in the woods. With his long white beard and hand-spun wool beret, he is a regular fixture as he rides his bike into town to collect his mail or attend a meeting. He spins his own wool and produces much of his own food from hunting and fishing, berry picking, and a large garden he has nurtured from what started out as less than stellar soil.

To a large degree I was self-taught, but I did get as much knowledge as I could from the old-timers. I went down and met the old-timers that lived here: Jo King at Long Lake (her husband, Harley, had been killed in the massacre in '83); the Collins Family; Jack Wilson at Crystal Creek; and Hank Hopper at Long Lake. These people at Long Lake all had big gardens. So I learned what they could and couldn't grow. I used to go down and visit Cliff Collins at Long Lake who homesteaded there in the early 1960s and had one of the better gardens in the valley because of his microclimate. He had six feet of topsoil and a huge lake that moderated the temperature well into September, so he had a twenty day longer season than I did, five miles up the road.

...I learned that if you dedicate your time and you have a good space to grow in you can make it work. Fortunately, I was down valley enough to be out of this glacial gravel that McCarthy is based on. I have six inches of topsoil and then silt sand underneath it, so I have a good gardening spot (Vail 2016).

In the first few years after acquiring his property, Mark did not live there full-time. In order to earn and save enough money to be able to afford this lifestyle, he continued to live and work in Anchorage and other parts of Alaska seasonally, including one winter as a cook on an oil exploration Cat train on the North Slope, another working on a fish processing boat in the Aleutian Islands, another as a cook at the Totem Inn in Valdez, and in the summer of 1989 he worked on the Exxon Valdez oil spill cleanup in Prince William Sound (Ibid).

I made enough money to pay off my property and to remove myself as much as possible from buying oil for power. ...I proceeded to just develop a lifestyle living off the land as much as possible. One of my challenges going in was to see how far I could remove myself from the economy. So how cheaply could I live, and over the first twenty years my income averaged \$3,000 a year. By the early 1990s, I started acquiring dogs and had a dog team for twenty years. My Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend check would guarantee a ton of dog food for the winter for the dogs and I went to Chitina every summer and caught salmon and canned it. I dug a garden by hand, chopping a circle with a mattock and every year I would add a ring around that circle so that now I have a garden that is forty feet in diameter and I grow most of my own produce (Ibid).

Today, Mark lives permanently at his homesite where he tends to spend more time in the peace and quiet of the boreal forest and his garden than he does mingling with people in McCarthy. This is especially true in the summer, when the town is overtaken by tourists.

Mark may be more connected with the environment and animals around him than he is with the other people of McCarthy. He does not carry a gun for bear protection. He feeds birds from his hand. He keeps detailed records of the weather and animals he sees:

I keep a daily journal and it is only on a calendar so the journal entries are one square inch, but all those years when I biked the McCarthy Road, I would always notate bear tracks on the road, moose crossing the road, anything I saw naturalist wise. I would catalog it, you know. And some years I would dedicate my observations to specific things like the flowering sequence of wildflowers. So every day I would note what was the new flowers and keep a list. I've done this for many years and I still do this for the passerine birds. I notate the arrival of the spring migration by bird.

Over time of keeping these observations going, I learned a lot about how the natural resource cycles work. I also observed climate and weather which then morphs into climate and just observing the glaciers disappearing quickly. ...And there definitely has been a decrease in grizzly bears.

...When you walk from your car the last mile home, you slow down, you have time to observe. It is a repetitive action so you have a long timeline of doing the same thing repetitively and the same thing with the decade where I didn't drive a car here. I biked to town. It was like I was doing a ten-mile transect once a week and observing natural history. ...I accrued a great amount of knowledge just by being steady at it in one place and over that time period all my systems improved: observation, seeing, and hearing (Vail 2016).

These records have proven to be useful for researchers studying various species and climate change in the area.

The population of the McCarthy area has waxed and waned since the re-population era of the 1950s, '60s and '70s, with as few as 28 residents in the McCarthy Census Designated Place (CDP) in 2010 (US Census Bureau 2012) and as many as one hundred permanent residents in 2012 (La Vine and Zimpelman 2014). A 2012 subsistence survey conducted in McCarthy by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game indicated the population to be 103, however, the survey area included areas outside the McCarthy CDP, "including homesteads along the McCarthy Road east of Strelna Creek" (Ibid:3). Community members indicated that the 2010 federal census excluded a substantial number of residents of the wider McCarthy area. They missed several residents who resided farther away from roads, so were harder to reach, as well as some people who consider themselves year-round permanent occupants but who work seasonally outside of the community so may not have been there in the spring of 2010 when the census was being conducted (Ibid:147).

In the summer of 1967, Curtis Green mentions who was there when he first arrived: "In addition to Gordon and Frieda [Burdick], other residents at the time of our arrival were: The Edwards family – Jim, Maxine and their two young children, Steve and Shelley; and Tom and Molly Gilmore. And that was it – the total population" (C. Green 1987:13). In the 1970s and early 1980s, there were as few as fifteen permanent residents. "The old timers came back for the summer. They always left in the winters. They were smarter than us younger ones" (G. Green 2016). But many of the locals prefer the quiet and isolation of McCarthy in the winter.

What I like about life in the winter is I get the town back. So for seven, eight months a year McCarthy is kind of [a place where] I can put a chair in the middle of the street and

kind of know that I got the wilderness and town and it is real quiet. In downtown it is pretty much just me. Some of us are less social than others. I don't really like to hang around with too many people anyway, but in the winter I am a little bit more social with locals. People say, "What do you do in the winter?" I mean, I don't know how to answer that. It is not really my thing to be all that worried about what to do in the winter. I just let the winter happen, you know. And I got plenty to keep me busy. I am never bored. I don't do anything different. I got maintenance [to do on my buildings], just ideas to explore, things to try out or consider, or how can I do that better. Or then sometimes there is nothing to do. You just kind of hang (Darish 2016).

Winter is when people who remain might visit or have meals together to mark special occasions. "There are a couple of things that happen in the winter, like Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas, New Year's, [where] people might get together with either just a couple of close friends or with [the] community. For Christmas, usually the ladies get together and make cookies for all the bachelors" (Darish 2016). Some people use the slower winter months to cooperate on repair projects, or get out to enjoy the vastness of the country. Gary Green describes why winter has special meaning for him:

That is our best season because the tourists go away. I am not against tourists. I am one myself whenever I travel, but in the winter you do find more time to do little things. Things that maybe aren't all that productive but that you want to do and you never find time to do it when you're busy with the summer activities. And in winter the country opens up a little more. The rivers are frozen and you can cross them so you can range further by snowmobile. It is definitely quieter. I used to have lots of trails I considered my own or when I was on them I owned the trail because there was nobody else on it. In the summertime now, that is almost impossible, but in the winter it is still possible and I like that. You can stop a snowmachine in the middle of the trail wherever you want and open your thermos, have a cup of coffee and enjoy your surroundings. If it is too busy or ten snowmobiles come by, that disrupts that (G. Green 2016).

For the philosophical Loy Green, winter was more than this. The cold and darkness forces one to spend more time indoors. There are fewer chores to do around the cabin. Life slows down. Bad weather might keep you close to home for long periods. Loy took advantage of these quiet snowy months in a particular way: "In the winter it's a special time. I have the time to think about God, read books, paint and play, and live simply. The winters give me the time to understand the link between mind, spirit and nature" (L. Green quoted in Defenderfer and Walkinshaw 1981:48).

Another important place that brought neighbors together for socializing in the winter has been the McCarthy airstrip. After the railroad stopped coming to McCarthy and before the road was passable, the mail plane was critical for providing connection with the outside world in the days before telephone and Internet. There is no post office in McCarthy, so meeting the plane was the only option for getting a letter from a loved one or receiving a package of essential supplies. No matter the season, gathering at the airstrip on mail days has been a wonderful way for McCarthy residents to socialize and stay connected. It is especially important in the winter months when the McCarthy Road is not maintained so access is limited, there are fewer people around and they may be more isolated than in the busy summer season. Unfortunately, on March 1, 1983, gathering at the airstrip proved tragic, when a temporary resident, Louis Hasting, went on a shooting spree and killed six people waiting for the plane on a lovely spring day.¹⁶ The airstrip continues to be a popular spot where people come together to catch up on each other's lives and happenings around town, although

with the Internet there is less reliance on the mail for contact with people far away so there are fewer people out on mail day than in earlier times (G. Green 2016).

“The rivers, wilderness, wildlife, and historic towns of the Wrangell Mountains have for many years attracted recreational visitors to the area” (Defenderfer and Walkinshaw 1981:31). Whether it was for hunting, mountain climbing, fishing, hiking, or river rafting. Some come for the resources, some come for the history, some come for the scenery, and some come to “find a spiritual journey in the silence of the Wrangell wilderness” (Ibid:36). But for all, the spectacular beauty and the wildness of the vast country drew them to this place. Historically, getting deep into the Wrangell Mountains was challenging. The Copper River and Northwestern Railway made it easier for a while with McCarthy and Kennecott as entry points. Then introduction of the airplane helped expand backcountry use. Finally, with establishment of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve in 1980, improvements to the McCarthy Road, the footbridge across the Kennicott River, and the National Park Service taking over ownership of the Kennecott Mine in 1997 and improving interpretation, visitorship in this part of the Wrangell-St. Elias area has risen markedly. And Joseph Sax pointed out in 1990 that “Kennicott is being discovered by the travel industry” (Sax 1990:8).¹⁷ For example, “in 1988 an estimated 5,000 people entered the Wrangell-St. Elias park via the McCarthy Road; by 1992, the number had jumped to 20,000” (Allan 2010:219).

Not everyone has been pleased with this shift. Many residents of McCarthy came to the area for the wilderness and the solitude. “This was to be not merely an adventure into the Alaska wilderness, but an adventure of the mind, a continuing education” (C. Green 1987:3). They do not like the steady stream of tourists wandering through town on any given summer day, gawking at them in their dirty jeans, fleece jackets, and muddy boots as if they are side-show attractions. Others are happy with the changes, like local business owner Neil Darish who offers hotel rooms, meals and drinks to the visitors (Darish 2016), or Kelly Bay or Gary Green who fly glacier sightseeing flights and deliver hunters, hikers and rafters to remote locations for their Alaskan adventures. As Gary Green explains, this can be tough balance to maintain:

There is good and bad because I’m in business. I have a flying service and there are lots of people to fly. There are more now than ever. But it used to be when I’d be at home if there was any noise that you could hear I was making it myself. I ran chainsaws. I’d shoot my gun. I fly airplanes. But when I would stop doing all those things, then it was quiet. And I’m sure people that live all over the region would have the same experiences because we’re spread out enough. And now McCarthy is kind of noisy. When I go home in the afternoon, I can hear all the traffic noise and air traffic is nonstop on busy days. I tolerate all those things because I do all the same things myself, but now there is no break from it. So I think the quality of life is less. I say we’re in the rat race. This is a zoo. You can’t stop and stand in the middle of the street and talk to your friends anymore because you’ll get run over and I used to like to stand in the middle of the street and drink a beer with friends. The good that the National Park has brought is more money and I am not a hundred percent sure that that’s good. It might be, but it’s questionable because I make more money than I would have, but I pay for that in what I consider a diminished lifestyle, a degraded lifestyle (G. Green 2016).

While everyone in McCarthy may have in common “a love of place,” the example of tourism shows that they remain divided about what they want this place to be and what it should be in the future (Defenderfer and Walkinshaw 1981; Allan 2010; Higgins 2015; Darish 2016). “You don’t know what the town is going to do” (Shaine 2016). No matter the topic, whether it is discussion of a bridge or hand-tram across the Kennicott River in the 1970s and 1980s, fighting over protection of the area

in a national park, debate over construction of a footbridge in the 1990s, the amount of construction and development that should be allowed, and how much to cater to tourists, the basic issues center around how many people should be allowed into the community and the nature of the community they wish to have. When creation of the national park was being considered in the 1970s, there were strong opinions on both sides of the aisle (Allan 2010). Conservationists and environmentalists argued for protection of the unique beauty of the Wrangell Mountains and hunters and miners wanted to live a frontier lifestyle, fearing that they would be locked out. In more recent years, McCarthy has grown with new outlying subdivisions (Fireweed Mountain, south side of McCarthy Creek, north end of the airport, and outside of the old townsite of McCarthy), and easier access bringing more people to the area. Some feel that the newcomers do not have the same wilderness values as the original settlers who arrived in the 1960s and 1970s, and that their influx has changed the feel of the place and degraded the quiet remote quality of the life they came for. Ben Shaine noted one distinct change in the community since the 1970s:

The thing is you knew everybody and you never saw anybody who didn't know you. Like it was a big change the first time I walked down the street in McCarthy and somebody didn't know who I was. Now most people don't know who I am, but that anybody wouldn't know everybody was different. That somebody would come into town and be unrecognized was a very odd thing. That there was a stranger in town (Shaine 2016).

In contrast to Ben Shaine's view of the 1970s as the ideal, another observer of change since the 1970s compared life in McCarthy now to how things were back in the pioneer mining days:

We are not as rugged and perhaps not as free. We are not as self reliant [sic]. Today we want to believe we are living a "bush" lifestyle, that we are the pioneers. Comparatively our lives are filled with a lot less adversity. Our lives would seem more foreign than the belief systems of the many immigrants who came seeking a new life. Our first residents' life experience was vastly different than ours. People did not travel with the ease we do today. In the world of 1900, most people did not venture far from their hometowns. Commercial radio broadcasts and rural electrification were yet to become widespread. Newspapers and telegraph were the only sources for reliable news. McCarthy was however, as modern or even more modern than most of America. Electricity was in McCarthy before most of Chicago had electricity (Unnamed person who grew up in McCarthy in the 1970s as quoted in Miller 2011d).

Mark Vail describes another big change in the community since he arrived in the 1980s:

The whole change thing in the community is always a very interesting subject because in the long run change is always incremental. It is only little bits at a time. But if you only come to visit once every ten years, change seems drastic. When you live in a place and you see change, you automatically accommodate it into your worldview and so trying to catalog it as dramatic, it is hard to pinpoint. But there are things that have changed the community. Communications is one of those. When I moved here, there were no phones. There hadn't been phones since the days of Kennecott. In the '80s, both lodges had radio phones, which cost five dollars a minute. In the late '80s, both Copper Valley Telephone and KCHU public radio out of Valdez came to a MALA [McCarthy Area Landowners Association] meeting and asked us if we wanted

improved communications and to a large extent it was unanimous, although there were people who said they didn't want it improved, but they would be the first ones to use it if it was.

...Getting phones was an interesting event because now instead of speaking publicly on issues you could have private conversations. Thus, you could design discussions before they were to occur in public by getting a consensus among a group privately without having to meet face-to-face. Where before you went to mail if you wanted to meet face-to-face and you had to speak publicly or we used CB radios in the '80s.

...I would say the communications has changed the community more than access by vehicles, although there is definitely a noted increase in vehicles on this side, which is tantamount to the fact that everybody who lives on this side has at least one vehicle. Not everyone, but the majority of people (Vail 2016).

In 1995, residents of McCarthy organized the McCarthy Area Landowners Association (MALA) as a way to have a broader voice in protecting the community. This was not the first attempt to form a group to voice local opinion. According to Curtis Green, in the summer of 1972 he founded the Chitina Valley Residents Association, which "drafted a petition stating our opposition to the road and circulated it throughout the valley, and beyond to property owners in Anchorage and Fairbanks" (C. Green 1987:26). As Mark Vail, one of MALA's founders and off-and-on president describes:

We had a town meeting where we just all got together to talk and I had been contemplating the fact that we were a small community, and we had no layer of government. We have no codes, no covenants, no taxes, no authority, but we are in an area where there are large organizations that have authority and have a play over the social, economic and development status of this area. We have the National Park Service, who is our biggest neighbor. We have the University of Alaska that owns 12, 15, 20,000 acres out here. The State of Alaska owns 20,000 acres in the Park. The Ahtna people and the subsidiary Native corporations own a million acres in the Park, plus or minus, and then there are the individuals that own property in the Park, and the outside forces that are bureaucracies that have power. ...The Park was creating a plan. And here we are as a community and no one had ever sat down to think about well what is our future going to be. Should we have a plan? So we formalized an organization and in the beginning it was called MALA, the McCarthy Area Landowners Association. It was just a dedicated forum for discussion and working towards consensus on issues that became prevalent so that we could stand up with one voice to address these Outside interests (Vail 2016).

In 1996, MALA became the McCarthy Area Council, a non-profit 501(3)(c) grant-receiving organization.¹⁸ This loose form of government has done things like taking a public stand against improvement of the McCarthy Road because of concerns about too many people coming in; mediating among residents about expansion of local businesses or construction of the member-only freight bridge; commenting on park management plans; and negotiating with the NPS over visitor and commercial access and provision of public services like toilets.

In a similar vein, Rick Kenyon started to publish the *Wrangell-St. Elias News* in July 1992 as a way to share information around the community and as a forum for people to express their views. As his wife Bonnie explained:



Main Street, McCarthy, 2016. Photo by Karen Brewster.

We ruffled feathers because Rick would do editorials and at that time the issues with the Park Service were pretty difficult. People were trying to make a transition from living out here without any government oversight and being self-sufficient and then we had the Park Service move in. It was not easy and people needed to vent their feelings. Editorials became very pointed and so some people either liked us or didn't like us. We just felt, well, we think there is a voice here. It needs to be said and we are just going to do it whether we are popular or not (Kenyon 2016).

In particular, Rick often used the paper as his personal editorial platform about park access, the permit system and local rights. This got particularly heated during the battle in the late 1990s and early 2000s over the Pilgrim family's access up McCarthy Creek and the involvement of national land rights advocacy groups (Kizzia 2013). "Access was something we felt, man, if we don't speak up about it, we could all lose somewhere in this way" (Kenyon 2016).

Rick and Bonnie Kenyon first arrived at Long Lake in the summer of 1977 where they met Hank Hopper, who only stayed there during the summer. He gave them the opportunity to build a cabin on his property, which would then be a place for them live in the winter. Having grown up in Florida, the Kenyons did not know anything about building a log cabin, but like their homesteader counterparts they learned by reading books and trial and error. Ralph Lohse, who was living at Long Lake, taught Rick some of the basics of wilderness living, including how to ice fish, which helped get them through the winter. In the summer of 1978, they acquired their own property on the west side of the Kennicott River from McCarthy from Jo and Harley King and proceeded to clear the land, build a house, establish a garden, and make it their permanent home. Like their peers, the Kenyons lived off the land as much as possible, hunting for meat, gathering and preserving berries, and growing a garden. However, the Kenyons did something that their neighbors had not done. They started church services.

We opened up our cabin on Sunday mornings and invited neighbors to come. We had people that would come from McCarthy, down from Kennecott, and over from Long Lake. The number of people would vary depending on how cold it was and whether people could travel. We had no formal training, although Rick and I had both been raised in Christian homes. My parents were in the ministry and so it was just nothing unusual. Reading the Bible was a daily occurrence (Kenyon 2016).

In the earlier occupation of McCarthy during the height of mining, residents promoted temperance and morality, including Margaret Harrais establishing a local chapter of the Woman's Christian Temperance Movement in the early 1920s, and there were periodic religious events, including traveling ministers, but a church was never established (Harrais n.d.; Miller 2011c). As with other elements of life in McCarthy, there was a diversity of opinion about the Kenyons and their religious services.

The group that would join with us on Sundays were people that were missing that Christian fellowship and encouragement. Others were out here because they wanted to get away from that kind of thing and structure, and I can understand that, too. Some you could tell in just their attitude to us, which was like, "You might be welcome here, but don't push that on me." So we just figured it was better to live it in front of them the best we knew how, and make it available for those that were interested (Kenyon 2016).

In 1994, with volunteer help and donations, the Kenyons and their congregation were able to start construction of a church building and had their first services there in 1996. The McCarthy-Kennicott Community Church sits atop a small hill of old glacial moraine between the rushing flow of the active waterway and the dried up old channel of the Kennicott River. Despite Rick Kenyon's death in 2014, the church continues to host Sunday services. For many in McCarthy, this church provides them comfort and a sense of community in a town with a long history of dissent and disagreement. For others, it is representative of a shift in McCarthy from the original pioneering back-woods, end-of-the-road types to a more mainstream "civilized" town society that they intentionally tried to get away from.

As is typical of an end-of-the-road community, McCarthy has had its fair share of characters. Some were harmless eccentrics who could not fit into mainstream society, while others were running from the law, or even worse were downright dangerous. Even if people disagree about community affairs, there is a level of acceptance that is not always present in mainstream America. This respect extends back to McCarthy's founding days:

Tolerance in McCarthy was generally widespread. While many disputes about bootlegging and prohibition remain the stuff of legend the town at the time understood its place in the economy of the day. The occasional ladies leagues feud erupted and accusations of fraud or corruption from various business and political elements were quickly settled. Politics were integral to McCarthy's survival as a commercial center and many businessmen and townspeople banded together in organized entities such as the Commercial Club promoting McCarthy's bright future and the Red Cross and Armenian Relief for charitable causes, Arctic Brotherhood, Masons and other fraternities flourished for fellowship and charitable/social causes. Sports were often organized events. Religion flourished but oddly no church was ever established in the early days, though traveling ministers were common. Sheriffs, constables and judges

were established. Prostitution was business in McCarthy and openly engaged in. Most of the women in the business were treated with respect if not considered respectable (Miller 2011b).

Still today, whether someone is homosexual, a hermit, or an unusual character, this does not matter to McCarthyites (Darish 2016). People are left alone to do their own thing and be whomever they chose. While this privacy has its benefits, there have been cases where the community might have benefited from a little intervention in other people's lives. There was the man named Raven in the 1970s who was growing massive amounts of marijuana (C. Green 1987; Gibert 2016). There was the horrible shooting massacre of six residents meeting the mail plane at the airstrip in March 1983. And the flamboyant Pilgrim family brought national attention to the area from lands right activists because of their run-in with the National Park Service over use of a bulldozer to access their mining claim and later for the sad family saga of brutality and abuse (Kizzia 2013).

Of course, like any small town, not everyone always gets along or agrees on things (Reckord 1983a). As mentioned previously, modern-day McCarthy has a history of debate among its residents about what the community should be. How much should it retain its rustic, frontier quality versus having modern amenities such as electricity and the Internet? Should access continue to be limited to a footbridge or should more private vehicles be allowed? Should construction of new buildings be controlled? Should the number of tourists allowed in be limited? Neil Darish who arrived in McCarthy in 2001 purchased the McCarthy Lodge and Ma Johnson's Hotel and has focused on expanding these businesses and starting others. In so doing, his views have proved counter to some of his neighbors. Neil sees opportunity in the tourism business and strives to offer the best accommodations and meals possible, while still wanting to retain the small town and historic feel of old McCarthy. He has even brought an executive chef in to prepare meals at the McCarthy Lodge Bistro and Golden Saloon.

My path is probably a lot different than most because I didn't come here just because of nature. I like that, but it was more because of the old stuff [historical artifacts] and I already knew I was going to live in nature somewhere so that wasn't really a big decision. ...We were trying to acquire the main hotel, the lodge, and our problem was how do we develop town and put our whole life into it and spend a ton of money and control the charm of town? Or how do we know it ain't going to get ruined? And the answer was authentic and intimate spaces for all different size groups.

...The plan was to have a steady growth. That is why I haven't added rooms to the Ma Johnson's because I need it to feel right. That is more important than how much revenue can we get. I have to charge enough to keep the whole machine going. ...If you walk in the saloon, it is a commercial business, but it feels right because it doesn't have swag everywhere. It doesn't have all the little advertising for it. There is no neon. ...I want to be able to walk down this town and feel good. ...It is real important to me that each business unit has its earnings target and hits it and that it is run on ratios. But the personality, the authenticity, that is the magic of McCarthy. Like these old buildings have a relationship to its past and it is still relevant today (Darish 2016).

Like his entrepreneurial predecessors, Neil owns a number of businesses in town upon which his entire livelihood is based. "I am a commerce guy. Primarily meaning I am trying to stabilize the town. I am trying to build businesses so the town can thrive and I am not the only one. There are all kinds of interesting ideas of what the town should be and contention about what the town should be. It has to be safe to talk about these critical issues" (Darish 2016). However, his neighbors do not always like the changes Neil has brought to town, how he operates his businesses, or the fact that he

stars in the Discovery Channel reality TV show "Edge of Alaska" that is filmed in McCarthy (Darish 2016). Neil does emphasize that he is following a long tradition in McCarthy: "It was a mercantile town. So the idea of commerce and velocity of money it is not an evil thing. It allows hard working men and women who are productive to trade that for something else and everybody's life gets better (Ibid)." Or as Neil's former business partner, Doug Miller, said about the legacy of early McCarthy:

There was every luxury you could imagine available in this remote outpost, including a dressmaker's shop, several hardware stores, many "fountains & pool halls" (perfect place to get a drink during prohibition). What these people accomplished can never be done again. They carved out of this wild landscape a community, one we still benefit from today. After all it's our colorful history; past and present, that entertains the many visitors. Romantic as it may be to compare ourselves to the founding members of our community, to believe we share the same goals and beliefs, we would be wrong (Miller 2011d).

Despite periodic disagreements, Neil loves McCarthy. He relishes living in a place where he can enjoy solitude and wilderness, and appreciates how for the most part everyone gets along or can at least socialize with each other even if they have different views on what they want their town to be in the long-run. "I think anybody knows that my heart is in this place" (Ibid). Although Neil makes his living from tourism, he spends his winters in McCarthy and like his neighbors enjoys the peace and quiet this brings. This seems to be one thing they can agree on.

Quarrelling is not a new thing in McCarthy. When he arrived in McCarthy in 1967, Curtis Green observed:

Surely, one might think, a hand full [sic] of people living in such a beautiful peaceful setting, far removed from the pressures of 'civilization' would be able to co-exist in at least relative harmony. Well, if so, one would think wrong. In no sense was McCarthy a community—it was more or less an anti-community, in that everyone was at odds with everyone else. Seems that the feud was as much a part of the bush scene as the bush pilot or the Blazo box (C. Green 1987:13).¹⁹

Despite their differences, today the people of McCarthy try to stick with their roots of cooperation and neighborliness. "You need to get along with your neighbors. Having enemies isn't a good thing. Having friends is" (G. Green 2016). In 1990, when trying to make sense of the community, Joseph Sax observed:

One key to understanding what they were about was the river tram system. I soon saw that the trams symbolized not exclusion but cooperation. The trams make everyone reliant on his or her neighbors for help in bringing in supplies. ...The trams—like much else about the way they lived—also symbolized a degree of self imposed burden that encouraged people to learn to take care of themselves and to develop their own resources. They were neither hermits nor ascetics, but people who wanted to stand aside from the sort of careless ease involved in just pushing a button. They have automobiles on their side of the river, but the cars cannot simply be taken to a garage. One has to develop repair skills or rely on neighbors. Everyone cooperates by having a skill to contribute. And the culture of the trams means that everyone has, in effect, to consider, pound by pound of hauling, the demands of his/her life style. The reluctance to bring in electricity and telephones, or to bridge the river, seems

for some residents a philosophically satisfying reluctance to give up that heightened awareness. For others it simply carries out a sort of back woods self-reliance that feels natural to people used to the bush in Alaska (Sax 1990:5-6).

In a 2016 oral history interview, Sally Gibert gave a personal and recent example of the beauty of this cooperative spirit:

A lot of people have very strong views. They are not always the same as each other's, but there is definitely a fundamental baseline underneath that it is more important that when you are out here at any given time and if you need help or if something is going on and it works to have multiple people helping out or something like that, people will rise to the occasion and help each other out. That you can call on people, but you don't do it lightly. In fact, when we drove in this time with the wind storm, there was a giant cottonwood that had come down across the road and we couldn't deal with it. It was too big. A lot of the smaller ones had already been cut out of the way, but then we got to the big one. It was like no way. So we called a guy whose number we had in our phone. I didn't have the whole community phone list. I said, "We are three miles out of town and we're stuck. Do you have any suggestions?" He called another guy who lived about a mile from where we were and 15 minutes later he shows up on his four-wheeler with a chainsaw and cuts this thing out of the way. He also had to cut a couple of other trees to get it so we could pass. You know, you just do it. We handed him a melon. Thank you, have a melon. That is the kind of stuff that happens and it is really cool. It is a very cool thing, but people also live as much as they can on their own. Self-sufficiency is valuable. You try to do what you can for yourself (Gibert 2016).

Long-term McCarthyites have a strong connection with and deep love for the place. As long-time resident Loy Green said, "If you could drive to McCarthy, it wouldn't be here" (L. Green quoted in Sax 1990:ix). They gain their identity from the lifestyle and from the Wrangell Mountains themselves. "The central piece of living here was being off the network. ...You left the modern world when you came here" (Shaine 2016). It is something they will all defend vehemently. This identity of independence, self-reliance, and resiliency remains a seemingly universal sentiment among homesteaders in the Wrangell-St. Elias area. "We are generally very accepting of anyone as long as you don't step on other people's toes" (Vail 2016). Acceptance is based upon having to prove yourself, whether it is in Slana or McCarthy. Mark Vail explains his experience as a relative late-comer:

It was interesting because I remember in my first summer having a discussion with one of the old-timers and him being like, "Who are you?" "Well, I am Mark and I just bought property at Fireweed and I am going to live here." He rolls his eyes and he goes, "We have seen thousands like you." Five years later we had become friends. He said, "You have done it. And you have never come to town going I need this, I need that, I need help, I need you to do this, this way or that way to satisfy my needs." I did my own thing and I didn't become dependent on the social structure and I have rarely worked for anyone in town other than on a volunteer basis. ...So I am not beholden to any of the commercial interests in town. As Les Hegland apparently once said, "There is always room in the country for good people" (Vail 2016).

The question remains whether there really is still enough room. Has the human carrying capacity been met in this inhabited wilderness? Are there enough resources, such as firewood or

moose, to support more people living off the land in the McCarthy area? Is there enough land still available for people to settle on? Considering that increased visitation has changed the nature of the place, how will a continued increase in a resident population affect what the residents want the place to be? Can the long-term residents impose a limit on who comes after them?

PEOPLE IN THE PARK

The intensity of feeling about what folks wanted out of a life in McCarthy came to a head during the ANILCA days and battle over establishment of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park (Reckord 1983a; Lappen 1984; Allan 2010). A lot of hostility was directed towards the NPS in the communities near the park by those who felt a national park would threaten their way of life, including heated remarks and threats at public meetings, rangers not being served at local businesses, NPS equipment being vandalized, and the first ranger station in Slana burning down in 1992 under mysterious circumstances (Allan 2010). In their interview-based study, *One Long Summer Day in Alaska: A Documentation of Perspectives in the Wrangell Mountains*, Donald Defenderfer and Robert Walkinshaw clearly present the variety of viewpoints that existed in the Chitina valley in the summer of 1980 on the subject of national park protection and explore “the potential effects of the Park Service presence in the region” (Defenderfer and Walkinshaw 1981:vii).

There was the conservation perspective of protecting what many thought was “the crown jewel” of Alaska by stopping mining and sport hunting and designating much of the area as wilderness. “It’s important to know wilderness is out there; just knowing my little boy will be able to go there after a hundred years makes it worthwhile” (Ibid:104). There was the frontier lifestyle perspective of those like Gary Green:

If you promote something enough it gets overused and you need to put in place more regulations and so you end up with less freedoms. And this country appealed to me so much when I first got here because we were totally free. You didn’t get permission to do anything. I mean we abided by hunting seasons and regulations, but the country was pretty much wide open and if you wanted to cut down a tree, you didn’t need a permit. If you wanted to go mining, you didn’t need a permit. It was just whatever you wanted to do. And now we have more regulations being implemented all the time and even when we were being sold on the ANILCA provisions and then all the land acts, it was promoted that continuation of existing lifestyles would be allowed. But it seems to be fading now. I think I liked less people and less regulation. It was a better quality of life for me, but I am attracted to ghost towns. I am not looking to be in big crowded environments. The Park promotion and development of the area has just increased people traffic (G. Green 2016).

And there were those devoted to freedom who did not want to be “denied a way of life” as represented by Steve Woods, who came to the Kennecott-McCarthy area around 1975:

The most incredible aspect was the freedom to choose a lifestyle of high quality. I fell in love with the vast unpolluted sense of space. The quiet and isolation made a lasting impression on me that here was something special. But it’s not a vacation when it’s sixty below with frostbite. That’s the life here that nobody sees (S. Woods quoted in Defenderfer and Walkinshaw 1981:48-49).

This mixture of lifestyles and viewpoints continues and is part of what makes McCarthy special. What Joseph Sax wrote in 1990 about McCarthy still rings true today:

Here in a single place three intertwined eras in Alaska's history lay almost literally one atop the other—the pristine wilderness, the intrepid exploitation of mineral wealth, and bush Alaska in its authentic late-twentieth century form. There is not an iota of fakery here. Nothing has been done to make things look or seem something they are not, either to impress, to profit or to prove a point. The risk is to fail to see the whole and thereby to miss what is special here, an evolving of the Alaskan experience through time (Sax 1990:9).

However, this also is exactly what makes it an especially challenging place for the residents as well as for the NPS mandated to manage the surrounding thirteen million acres.

When I was living out here at the time when the Park was first created, just the fact that it was a now a Park was so dramatic for people living out here. It was just such a mindbender for everyone, including the Park Service, that nobody did anything. I mean, there was really very little Park management. The Park managers kind of didn't want to hang out here and manage the Park. They didn't even really know it very well and they were kind of afraid of being out here with all these crazy locals. There was a lot of resistance by many people to having any real Park presence out here. So there wasn't a lot of park-ness out here back then (Gibert 2016).

We are not in the wilderness. We are in McCarthy. In McCarthy, you can see the wilderness from here, but it is not the wilderness and it is why we are here and not 15 miles a little further down the road. It is because we chose to be in this community not to be in the wilderness. If you want to be in the wilderness, it is the backcountry trip. ...McCarthy is the gateway. Every Park has a gateway. It is just this gateway happens to be privately owned (Darish 2016).

The National Park Service continues to try to balance public access to the park's natural, cultural, and historical resources with the interests of local residents and maintaining the feel of a place that originally attracted people to it. As an unidentified WRST ranger said in 2012, "This is not a normal NPS situation. You usually don't have private communities within parks" (Higgins 2015:63). This is different than most national parks, which have a more limited and clear-cut mandate to protect natural resources or scenic beauty.

McCarthy is the last remaining remote intact community of individuals inside a National Park. Contrary to popular belief, McCarthy was never a ghost town – since its start, there was always at least a few people living in McCarthy! The private land inside the center of Wrangell-St. Elias represents a continuous community rich in Alaskan history. Restoration of McCarthy by local residents and property owners has resulted in a powerful connection between past and present. The responsibility of preservation is a shared agenda of all who are touched by this uniquely Alaskan drama, still playing out, and located in the very center of America's largest national park (Miller 2011d).

The first Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve superintendent, Chuck Budge, explained that "The Park Service views the Wrangell Mountains as one of the toughest management areas that the Park Service has" (C. Budge quoted in Defenderfer and Walkinshaw 1981:101). Management becomes much harder when protecting people and a lifestyle are thrown into the mix, especially

when what that lifestyle means remains a moving target and when NPS staff may not have training or experience with socio-cultural and historical matters.

Protecting that solitude is the challenge that confronts both the Park Service and the property owners. McCarthy is in danger of being loved to death. Long lines at the tram and disposal of human waste and garbage are growing problems during the summer months. Residents want to preserve the rural character of their town, yet other people have the right to visit their national parks.

People value McCarthy because it is different. The road and the tram act as a kind of time machine, sheltering McCarthy from the machinations of technological society. McCarthy had no television, no telephones, and no school. The only regular contact with the outside world is a once-a-week mail plane. The town moves at an unhurried pace, exactly what visitors come to experience. The paradox is that communities begin to lose their special identities as soon as they are visited by hordes of people trying to discover that identity. Those towns become more like the place you came from and less like the place you want to go. At the moment, the road and the tram stand in the way of 'progress' at McCarthy. Whether they will be 'improved,' and McCarthy allowed to become just another roadside attraction, is a question that remains to be answered (Kirchhoff 1993:96-97).

Just as the local reaction to the park was mixed in the 1970s, it remains a complicated relationship to this day (Reckord 1983a; Allan 2010). As Sally Gibert, who was a park proponent and conservation advocate and has spent her career as the ANILCA Coordinator for the State of Alaska, explains:

It isn't easily sorted by pro or anti-Park. I mean, I can put myself in either one of those categories really fast depending on the issue. I can frequently find myself more in these ambiguous places of a little of both. Like there are advantages to that, but oh, my God, it is a problem this way. There are more and more people like that, that they recognize that there is some value, but there are some costs to it, as well. But there still are people who aren't that way (Gibert 2016).

Despite the stresses of neighborly debates and disagreements, the changes the community has gone through, and the challenges of living a remote lifestyle at the end of a 60-mile gravel road, committed McCarthyites have not moved away. They have stayed for the reasons that drew them there in the first place. For a love of the lifestyle and their connection to the spectacular and challenging landscape.

The people that live here are diverse people that love adventure, excitement. More happens here than most anywhere. There are different types of activities and levels of excitement here than most places and you have wilderness at your door, which is always important to me. Waking up to a bear pawing at your window and stuff like that is a little bit threatening, but it is also exciting and it gives you something to talk about that day. And I would hate to live somewhere where nothing ever happens. McCarthy is happening (G. Green 2016).

This Alaskan country has made us very happy. We intend to stay here the rest of our lives. This country gives us what we want—harmony (A. Gagnon quoted in Defenderfer and Walkinshaw 1981:48).

I don't know if the real reason I am here can be conceptualized. Perhaps the reason lies up McCarthy Creek in December at forty degrees below zero in a storm. But I don't think the answer to why I am here can be found by looking for it. ...You are here in the Wrangells in spite of McCarthy. You are here because this wilderness is special, and that's what's important about the Wrangell Mountains—this is not Iowa. There are forces here that may not be in other places. ...Go take a walk fifteen miles into the wilderness, and go out and see the land, interview a moose. Then perhaps you'll understand why I am here (B. Shaine quoted in Defenderfer and Walkinshaw 1981:49).

I really was attracted to McCarthy because the history of the mining era and the railroad and all that always intrigues me too. And, now, in later life, when I see most parts of the world it is hard to say the Wrangell-St. Elias and the McCarthy area isn't one of the most outstanding points in the globe. It is not that I am prejudiced, but I have seen a lot of places in the world that I like, but nothing is going to top that (Smith 2016).

The passion that I and everyone I know have for wilderness has many different forms. There is no one lifestyle. That's ridiculous. There is all hybrid lifestyles as there should be and that at the core there is none of these lifestyles are about destroying where we are. ...We are here for a reason. We are not here because we have to be. Some people are, you know, born here and some people are called to be here (Darish 2016).

ISOLATED HOMESITES

McCarthy was not the only place to live in the Chitina River valley. As mentioned previously, the region has a long mining history, ranging from the large-scale industrial mining of the Kennecott Copper Mine to small-scale individual prospectors spread around the rivers and creeks around McCarthy. Many of the structures associated with these homesites and mining claims in places like Dan Creek, May Creek, McCarthy Creek, and Nizina River have long since disappeared, but some of the people stayed and did other things after the collapse of mining. For instance, after having participated in the Chisana Gold Rush, Jim and Tess Murie started the Nizina Roadhouse near May Creek in 1916, where they remained until his death in 1940. In 1944, Tess married Walter Holmes who prospected on a tributary of Copper Creek and on Rex Creek, and they rebuilt the roadhouse and were caretakers of the May Creek airstrip until Walt's death in 1967 (Bleakley 2006:54-55). And in 1966, after Al and Fran Gagnon acquired property at May Creek, they continued the tradition of living on an isolated homestead in the area.

Another sign of the early period of settlement, there were numerous trails and old mining roads that prospectors used as transportation corridors to return to McCarthy to re-supply or to live for the winter. As these remote homesteads and mining camps were abandoned, the paths and roadways were used less and less. Slowly, they have returned to their natural state of overgrown brush and trees or have been eroded away by the changing river channels. In addition, the bridges have collapsed, making travel impossible even if you could locate the old routes.²⁰ In more recent times, however, those families living on isolated homesteads in the Chisana, White, Nizina and upper Chitina River valleys mostly have used airplanes or snowmachines in winter to get to their homes. Rarely, a small tractor might have been driven up a frozen river to haul in a large amount of supplies in the winter (Reckord 1983a:15; Kizzia 2013).

Loy and Curtis Green were well known residents up McCarthy Creek from the 1960s to the 1990s, partially for the level of sophistication they maintained despite their location. Ben Shaine remembers a particularly poignant moment:

It was in the evening and they had finished dinner. I remember walking in and one of them had made parfaits and they had wine glasses and they had layers of whipped cream and sweet stuff. I don't know if maybe it was based in jam or whatever, but it was layered very carefully and beautifully so that there was one layer after the other after the other in these parfait glasses. Here were these two bachelor brothers sitting at the table in this house they didn't own in McCarthy, and elegantly and slowly eating their parfait dessert (Shaine 2016).

Sally Gibert adds her own memories of the Greens:

They were very cultured in many ways, very cultured, more than most people out here. Loy Green who had an eighth grade education was a philosopher. He also knew how to repair a snowmachine and was a baker. He was a really good baker. One time my husband, Dick, and I skied up McCarthy Creek. Unannounced we came out to McCarthy from Anchorage for spring break. There was no phone, radio or anything. We just said, "Oh, let's go visit Curtis and Loy." So we skied up there. We arrived and Loy had made a sourdough chocolate cake that day. A full size sourdough chocolate cake. He couldn't understand why he decided to do this. It was just him and Curtis. He made this sourdough chocolate cake for us. He didn't know we were coming. He didn't know why he had made it until we showed up. Then he said, "Oh, now I know why I made this fantastic sourdough chocolate cake" (Gibert 2016).

In the winter of 1975/1976, Ben Shaine and his wife, Marcie, lived at Spruce Point, located at the confluence of the Chitistone and the Nizina Rivers. At the time, they did not have a snowmachine. They explored the Nizina valley on skis and would visit their friends, Curtis and Loy Green, who were caretaking that winter at May Creek. The trip was a full day's travel one way (Shaine 2016). In 1981, it was reported that five families still lived in the mining camps at Dan and May Creek (Henning et al. 1981:40). In recent years, a few people have continued to reside at these far off outposts. Mike Monroe, locally nicknamed "Tanker Mike," tried to make a home for himself out of an abandoned tank structure near the old Kennecott Mine. Tim Mischel lived for many years at 1,300 feet on Bonanza Ridge in the angle station of the former aerial tramway system built to haul ore and supplies between the Bonanza Mine and the mill a couple of miles below.²¹ In 2002, the Pilgrim family occupied an old homesite up McCarthy Creek that they called "Hillbilly Heaven" (Kizzia 2013). And Fred Denner has spent forty-plus years leading a subsistence lifestyle of hunting, trapping and log-building at Dan Creek, recently expanding his activities to include digital photography.²²

CHITINA: HUB OF THE COPPER

While not exactly fitting the definition of homesteading, the community of Chitina, located at the confluence of the Chitina and Copper Rivers, is another place where the residents lead a very land-based lifestyle and have close associations with the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park area. Many Alaskans only know Chitina as the access point for red salmon fishing on the Copper River. They may stop to buy gas or grab a beer and burger at the local bar, but they are unaware of the community hidden beyond the main road.

Although there was an Ahtna winter village located southeast of the current site of Chitina, where Taral Creek enters the Copper River, Chitina only began to be known as a town by non-Natives around 1907 when it became a main stop on the Copper River and Northwestern Railway from Cordova to McCarthy/Kennecott. It was a hub for the rest of the Upper Copper River and Chitina River valleys.



Aerial view of Chitina, circa 1934. Bleakley Collection, Makawao, Hawaii.

At its zenith, Chitina was only a road junction at a railroad stop. It was never a big place. There was an Indian village nearby, a post office, two hotels, a good-sized Alaska Road Commission Camp, the general store, a pool hall, the Arctic Brotherhood Hall which doubled as a movie theatre, workshops, barns, and about 30 houses and cabins. The town was put there to serve the Copper River and Northwestern Railway (Clarke 2002:2).

With the coming of the railroad and mining at Kennecott, more and more outsiders arrived in Chitina and the surrounding countryside. Thomas Henry Holland, who was a member of the engineering force that made one of the first surveys for the Copper River and Northwestern Railway, is said to have staked the first homestead and built the first cabin in Chitina around 1911 (Bleakley 2006:54). Holland was born in Calwood, Missouri in April 1876, and in addition to his railroad and Chitina connections, he and partner Billy Wilds prospected the upper Chitina River. Holland also served as a representative in the territorial legislature from 1915 to 1917, and as Chitina's deputy US Marshal in 1940. He remained in Chitina until at least 1943, when his name appears on a list of Yellow Band Mining Company stockholders (Ibid). At this time, life in Chitina was rustic and like most of Alaska still focused on subsistence living. This development of Chitina led to conflicts between the newcomers and the local Ahtna who lived nearby. There was racism against Natives, there was competition for subsistence resources, and there was conflict over land access rights. "In spite of that impact, the village men still trekked far and wide in the winter, trapping and hunting as they had always done, along the great rivers" (Clarke 2002:37). For the most part however, the two groups kept to themselves (Clarke 2002; Knutson 2016). Some folks had businesses and built homes in the town itself, while others pushed farther afield to places like the mouth of the Chitina River, Strelna, or Long Lake, to carve out their spot in the wilderness. For example, Gustaf "Gust" Tobias Wilson, born in Sweden in November 1865, reached Alaska about 1905 and subsequently prospected, trapped, and homesteaded near the



Laura Brown and unidentified woman behind the counter inside Brown's store at Chitina, circa 1930. Courtesy of Dick Anderson and Susan Gilpatrick.

mouth of the Chitina River near the Ahtna village of Taral. He died in December 1930 after falling from the Fox Creek trestle along the Copper River and Northwestern Railway (Bleakley 2006:128). The numbers of residents on isolated homesteads varied depending on the time period, but at least in 1977, "one local resident estimated that 30 to 40 families lived along the McCarthy Road. Most live on small isolated homesteads which seem to cluster at creek crossings, such as Long Lake, Chokosna, and Strelna" (Reckord 1983a:15). Nevertheless, Chitina remained the social and economic hub. "It was the last stop for hundreds of miles in every direction, where a person could get almost everything worth buying" (Clarke 2002:53).

By 1938, when the railroad and Kennicott Mine shut down, just as in McCarthy, people started abandoning Chitina in search of economic prosperity elsewhere. Chitina lost its primary reason for being, so it shrank to a minimal size. The resident Native population continued to live in their village and practice their subsistence traditions, and what had once been an active frontier area for non-Natives, returned to its roots as a wilderness setting with a few people spread out across the landscape in small cabins and finding sustenance from the land.

Chitina had changed greatly by the time we arrived nine years after the railroad had shut down. In fact, Chitina had become a ghost town. There were only about a hundred people living there, most of whom were Indians. The Chitina Cash Store had survived the railroad, and a combination drugstore/post office sat across the street next to the road out of town (Clarke 2002:3).

By 1949, Otto A. Nelson (often referred to by the initials O.A.) owned most of Chitina. Nelson was born in Revere, Missouri, about 1885, and trained as a civil engineer. He worked as a school teacher before coming to Alaska in 1908 for a surveying job on the Copper River

and Northwestern Railway. He settled in Chitina where he served as the community's US Commissioner during the 1920s and as postmaster from 1924 to 1955. He purchased the platted townsite from the railroad when it shut down in 1938, owned several parcels of local mining property, including a Copper Creek placer claim in the Nizina district, and teamed up with N.P. Nelson (no relation) to form the Nelson Mining Company to mine in the Chisana district. In addition, O.A. Nelson was a stockholder in Gillam Airways and the Hubbard-Elliott property, a director of the Nabesna Mining Corporation, and a director and secretary-treasurer of the Yellow Band Mining Company (Bleakley 2006:90). He also operated the Chitina Cash Store, the post office, and the old Commercial Hotel, which he renamed "Spooks Nook." Artwork created by his niece adorned the old buildings (C. Green 1987:7). To keep the store shelves stocked, "he trucked merchandise in from Valdez during the summer and served the needs of about seventy-five Natives and twenty-five whites who still lived in the area in the 1940s and 1950s" (Hunt 1996:26). And in 1947, he and his son, Adrian, provided electricity to the non-Native part of Chitina via a small hydroelectric power plant they installed at the river (Clarke 2002:37). "An indefatigable booster of Chitina, Nelson led the effort to construct a connecting highway to Cordova, personally building the first two miles of the road in the early 1950s. He died in Seattle in June 1962" (Bleakley 2006:90). According to Curtis Green, Merle Smith took over Chitina after O.A. Nelson died:



Commercial Hotel and Jack Palmer's Place in Chitina, circa 1930. Candy Waugaman Collection, Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve, National Park Service.

Then after his passing, around 1960, Smitty acquired the property. There was some chicanery involved here, as O.A. and Smitty were mortal enemies and the last person on Earth [sic] that O.A. would have wanted his empire to pass to was "Mudhole" Smith (C. Green 1987:7).

From the 1930s into the 1960s, Cordova Airlines and pilots like Merle Smith, Merritt Kirkpatrick, Harold Gillam, Jack Wilson, Herb Haley, Howard Knutson and Kenny Smith based airplane charter and freight services out of Chitina. After Herb Haley was killed in a plane crash at Lake Iliamna in 1954, Howard Knutson became the station chief and pilot for Cordova Airlines at Chitina in 1956. He flew for them until 1965, when he started his own guiding and outfitting business and moved to Anchorage.

Howard Knutson and his wife Adina ran the operation. Adina was post mistress and ran the hotel, including all the cooking. She had the reputation of being a hard worker and it was asserted that when it came to hard physical labor, she could outwork any two normal men. Howard was the mail pilot and flew the mail once a week from Cordova to Chitina, Long Lake, McCarthy, May Creek and Chisana. He also flew hunters in during the season and handled all the nitty gritty mechanical stuff (Ibid).

The comings and goings of airplanes, and eventually having a road, helped maintain Chitina as a center of life in the valley. Nevertheless, Chitina remained a fairly small town. For instance, in the winter of 1963, besides the Knutsons and Curtis and Loy Green, some of the other folks living in Chitina included:

Ray Stalder, part time surveyor... his wife Shirley and their three young sons ... Mark Goodman, prospector, college football hero and a drinking man. Paddy King, his sister, Suzy Brickle and Tom Bell, elderly Copper River natives. The school teacher, Ann Bohmer and her husband, Joe. The extensive Billum clan, also natives. Johnny Billum maintained the road, summer and winter from Lower Tonsina to Chitina. Henry Schultz, an old prospector based in McCarthy, who was temporarily tending the cash store. And Neil [Finnesand], of course, who was sometime bartender. The state required a minimum of eight children to fund a school, so I guess there were that many. The two Knutson girls, three Stalder boys and, I guess three Billum kids.

There was no one at all between Chitina and Long Lake, with the exception of Sam Moore and Ray Vroble, two trappers based at Strelna. They also had the only two snowmobiles in the whole country (Ibid).

People from around the Chitina River Valley would come into "town" for supplies, to collect their mail, and to socialize. Gary Green mentions walking into Chitina in the winter of 1973/74 from a cabin at Strelna, which is across the Copper River and about ten miles up the Chitina River:

The coldest temperatures I have seen in the Wrangells was one of the winters I was at Strelna and we hit 66 below and Chitina hit 60 below two or three times in those years. And dressing up and I would walk from Strelna to Chitina to check the mail and it was 15 miles each way, but I would usually then camp out in some cabin in Chitina for a day or two before I'd walk back to Strelna. And I remember walking that distance. I mean we didn't have anything else really to do so it was an okay walk, but dropping down in the Copper River when it is 50 or 60 below and there is a flow of air in the river valley you could definitely get frostbite. The Copper River Bridge was in at the time and crossing that was the coldest part of the walk.

Ralph and Bob Lohse, two brothers, were trapping and living at Long Lake which is 40 miles in. They would come and go to Chitina now and then and then they would run their traplines in the Long Lake vicinity. So there was always some sort of a snowmachine trail and we would just walk on that. It would be hard enough to walk on (G. Green 2016).

Some moved into Chitina temporarily for the winter, such as prospectors like Neil Finnesand who were unable to work their claims in the cold winter months, or homesteaders like Jim Edwards who lived in McCarthy and needed to earn a living for part of the year. This added to the size and character of the community. Similar to other frontier towns at the time, it seems that much of the socializing in Chitina in the winter occurred at the hotel bar (Clarke 2002; G. Green 2016).

While the population has decreased significantly since its railroad heyday, Chitina remains a small close-knit community with its own unique character. The 2010 US Census indicates 126 year-round residents, an increase from 49 in 1990 and 123 in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2012:15). Of course, subsistence activities continue to form a vital part of people's lives (La Vine and Zimpelman 2014), and Chitina is still a hub and gathering place for people settled on homesteads around the area, such as at Strelna or Long Lake, or along the Edgerton or McCarthy Roads. As recently as the 1980s and 1990s, Chitina was where these remote folks would go to purchase supplies. Mark Vail explains a particular memory:

I did do twice annual trips to Chitina. Mrs. Ivey in Chitina at the time had the Chitina Cash Store. She lived in Chitina for 30 years and she was a little angel. She would have in stock those necessities that a homesteader further out would need at the appropriate time. One time a friend and I drove in in the spring as soon as the road opened and he needed plastic to cover his greenhouse and I needed potting soil to start seedlings. We thought we'd have to go all the way to Glennallen. We drove to Chitina and went in Mrs. Ivey's store and there was a ramp down to the cash register and leaning against the counter at the cash register was a bale of potting soil and a roll of Visqueen. We're like, "Mrs. Ivey, this is like a little miracle. How can you do this?" And she goes, "Well, I know what people need this time of year." She'd drive a truck into Anchorage and shop at Costco and then mark it up three percent. She had only one shopping cart in that store (Vail 2016).²³

There also is a focus on the arts and history in Chitina that might not be obvious to a tourist, park visitor, or dipnet fisherman just driving through. Similar to McCarthy, in the 1970s and 1980s Chitina attracted people looking for a simpler life away from the city in a place where they could be closer to nature. The beauty of the surrounding landscape provided inspiration for those with an artistic side, including jewelry maker Art Koeninger. He moved to Chitina in 1978 when decades of a shrinking population and slowly dying community left many original railroad era buildings abandoned and in disrepair. Art purchased and restored the former Tin Shop building on Main Street. The Tin Shop was built in 1912 by Fred Schaupp who was a sheet metal worker who used the first floor as a workshop and lived on the floor above (Bleakley 2006:107). Fred was originally from California and first arrived in Nome for the gold rush and then ended up in Chitina in 1910. He and his wife had three children, moved to Cordova in 1918, and then back to California in 1925 (Koeninger 1993). While Art sort of fell into what became an overwhelming historic preservation project, he feels that it has been a positive contribution to the community:

It wasn't all that simple. It took four or five years, a couple of grants and extensions, and a lot of volunteer help to finish the building. I and a lot of volunteers did the

labor, and we resurrected this old building based on looking at old photographs. We had a great time. So there's been a return to society in that the historic legacy's been preserved. ...I've always felt that one needs to return to society. There's no free ride. Not just because of my grant, I feel like my labor in the building fulfilled that obligation, but just in general I've always felt like we all need to be socially responsible (Ibid).

The old tin shop was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in June 1979 (#79003763),²⁴ and in 1986 Art opened Spirit Mountain Artworks art gallery in the downstairs portion of the restored building.²⁵ As a tourist business that mostly sells to people from outside the community, the store has benefited from the increase in park visitation that has blossomed since the mid-1990s. "Over the years, there've been more park visitors and I've been more established [with my business] so we've kind of grown together" (Ibid). Art committed himself to Chitina as a community, not only as a business owner but also with his time as a first responder and volunteer with the fire department.

Art Koeninger saw a lot of change in Chitina between 1978 and 1993 when he was interviewed for the Wrangell-St. Elias Project Jukebox oral history project. In particular, he discussed the changing relationship with the National Park Service:

I was here before the park. ...I remember some of the early days and all of the speculation that we wouldn't be able to build outhouses, and they would buy up all the adjacent land and run people off. One of the businesses in Glennallen had [a sign that said] "Park Service Not Welcome Here." Wouldn't serve park service personnel. That sort of thing. ...I've gotten to know the park rangers, the local guys. They're usually like seasonal workers. College jobs or freshly out of college, and the volunteers. And have, for the most part, had a good relationship with the people themselves. I treat them as people, and they do me. So I've gotten along and actually developed a social relationship with some.

...I feel like as time passes and a lot of people's fears are allayed, that there is a better relationship. It's still not good. The park service is still a large federal bureaucracy, and I think that's probably a lot of the frustration, both from the park workers themselves and the people that sometimes you feel like the rules are not made for the particular situations here. ...There've been other times when I feel like people have attacked park people personally, rather than taking it to the system.

...I think the park service is bending over backwards trying to understand and be understood. And I don't envy them wearing their little green suits. There's more that they could do to be more open, but I think they're making a stab at it anyway (Ibid).

After twenty-five years in Chitina, Art moved to Homer, Alaska in 2003. He continues to manage the business end of Spirit Mountain Artworks, and maintains and improves the building in Chitina during seasonal visits there.

As visitation to Wrangell-St. Elias National Park has increased with improvements to the McCarthy Road, and more Alaskans participate in the personal use dipnet salmon fishery in the Copper River, the community of Chitina has been faced with growing pains. Like McCarthy, Chitina has had to figure out how they want to deal with this growth and the presence of more tourists. In the early 1990s, when the influx of tourists started to pick up, the biggest issues were the need for services like outhouses, parking, road maintenance, and fire and rescue. The question was how to pay for these services instead of continuing to rely on local volunteers. Volunteerism has worked in the smaller community of McCarthy and worked fine in Chitina when the population was small or there were relatively few problems, but as the community changed and the needs grew it was no longer a

viable approach. Some residents, such as Art Koeninger, thought that with the increased demand for services, Chitina was being forced to take on more than it could afford. Some residents thought the State of Alaska should pay for these newly required public services. Others thought a local sales or bed tax could raise the needed funds. In his 1993 oral history interview, Art discussed some of these issues, and wondered how they could turn the revenue from tourism, which was the cause of the growth, directly into paying for the services the tourists now required.

I think that the community has recognized that things have changed. ...I think people are concerned about it overwhelming us. ...I think we recognize just with what's developing now with the park, dipnetting, just overall tourism, that big things are going to happen. ...I feel that the people who are promoting all of this development are being short-sighted by not taking responsibility and saying, "Okay, this is the cost of this development, and we're going to have to have some sales tax or something. ...You know, "How can we get the money from tourism into the tank to fuel that fire truck? ...A lot of places have property taxes [to pay for these things], and that's anathema down here. Government in general is anathema in this part of the country (Ibid).

Art concluded with the idea that as a tourist-based business, maybe he could put out a donation jar at his art gallery where contributions would help pay for the increased number of times the local fire department had to go put out campfires left burning or rescue inexperienced visitors who were injured or got themselves into precarious positions (Ibid). No matter how this was all resolved or paid for, Chitina today serves as the starting point for the McCarthy Road and a pleasant gateway to Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. There is a large parking area and public wayside with a maintained outhouse facility in the center of town, tourist accommodations and eateries are available, there are ways for dipnetters to access the river and fishing grounds, and the Chitina Native Corporation plays a larger role in the community than in the past.

Today, many people think of Chitina as a mostly Ahtna village. Per 2010 census information, Chitina is reported to be about 30 percent Alaska Native (US Census Bureau 2012). The Chitina Native Corporation and Village Council are strong economic and political forces in the community. However, the situation for Natives has not always been good in what for a long time was a predominantly non-Native town. According to Larry Clarke, who was a teenager in Chitina in the late 1940s, conditions were not good for Natives. The village had been "partially absorbed into the white culture" (Clarke 2002:37) and there was extensive poverty.

The [Indian] village was dying by 1948. There were very few children, and fewer and fewer families staying there because most of the more active and skilled Indians had moved north to Glennallen to work for the Road Commission, operating graders and cats. Those who were left behind were barely surviving, either just above or just below the poverty level of living (Clarke 2002:70).

Howard Knutson described Chitina in the 1950s and 1960s as about half Native and half non-Native, but "mostly Native." When asked how the two groups got along, he answered, "Oh, just fine" (Knutson 2016). Gary Green mentioned Chief Paddy visiting him and his friends at their cabin at Strelna and how much he enjoyed listening to the chief's stories and songs (G. Green 2016).

There is a vibrant Native population in Chitina today. The Chitina Native Corporation operates a store and a gas pump, and oversees a permit program that allows participants in the Chitina Personal Use Fishery and other recreational activities to cross the corporation's private property to get to the river and fishery. The NPS regularly consults with the Chitina Village Council on subsistence and other

park management issues as part of their tribal government to government relationship. Relations between the Native and non-Native residents of Chitina have improved since the initial takeover of the townsite by the railroad in the early 1900s, but more can be done to bring the cultures together.

WHY PEOPLE STAYED

Despite the difficulties of living a remote lifestyle, the isolation of life on a rustic homestead, conflicts that you might have with your neighbors, and the frustrations of trying to bring diverse people together to make decisions, people who have carved out a life for themselves in the wilderness of the Wrangell-St. Elias area have three main reasons for staying. The first is a sense of freedom.

I go Outside [to the Lower 48 states] for a week and I'm ready to come back. You just miss it. It kind of gets into your blood. I guess the freedom to just go out in your yard and do what you want to do. We've gone to work in Anchorage and rented an apartment and it just doesn't work anymore. You just kinda get this in your blood and it's hard to adapt to society, I guess. It's a feeling that you own it. It's yours. You own a piece of dirt (West 2012).

The second is connection with community and finding like-minded people.

Now why did I come here? We were looking for an alternative community. A community where we might find people of a similar frame of mind. I was looking at a community which would be run on the principles of cooperation, self-help, and self-sufficiency, because in that way we are less entangled with the complexities of the world as it is. We wanted a community that was more inclusive. ...The community worked together and helped each other. Many people were in the same circumstance, so there wasn't the stigma of a "dumb, welfare-living homesteader" or indigent, which was the categorization of somebody who wasn't very well off in other places. Where up here, everybody worked together (Lightwood 2012).

The third is an appreciation for independence and self-reliance and of being in a place where they can spend time outdoors and rely upon the land for much of their sustenance.

McCarthy and Chisana represent the only permanent communities remaining in the Wrangells. ...Outside these enclaves, some individuals live on homesteads, alone or in small groups scattered throughout the region. In the Wrangells most of these groups are clustered along the Chitina-McCarthy and Nabesna roads, and in the Dan Creek-May Creek area. Guiding, trapping, and prospecting provide some income for many of these residents. A few near Strelna farm marginal agricultural land. Others work outside the region in seasonal jobs, and still others have no discernable means of income. The very few people living in remote areas of the Saint Elias range follow a subsistence lifestyle. All of these people have one trait in common, a high degree of independence and a desire to be free of government restraint. ...Non-Native residents tend to be very independent, for the most part conservative, and opposed to any form of government control (Henning et al. 1981:132).

For many of these people, living this way has given them an identity and self-worth, and it is difficult for them to think of living any other way.

Endnotes

¹The final homestead in Alaska – and the nation – was patented on May 5, 1988 to Kenneth W. Deardorff for land near Lime Village in western Alaska (King n.d.).

²For more about the Sourdough Roadhouse, see “Sourdough Roadhouse, A Stop For the Weary” by Ray Bonnell (*Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, June 8, 2013, http://www.newsminer.com/features/sundays/sketches_of_alaska/sourdough-roadhouse-a-stop-for-the-weary/article_61457560-cfde-11e2-9d56-001a4bcf6878.html, accessed November 9, 2016), and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sourdough_Lodge (accessed November 9, 2016).

³See the trapping chapter for more about John, Nelson and Earl McCrary as trappers and fox farmers.

⁴Sam Lightwood died in July 2012 at age 84.

⁵US census data indicates the population of the Kenny Lake CDP in 2000 was 410 and in 2010 was 355 (US Census Bureau 2012:15). A 2012 subsistence survey done by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game recorded the Kenny Lake/Willow Creek area to have a population of 417, but the survey area included both the Kenny Lake CDP and Willow Creek CDP used by the US Census Bureau (La Vine and Zimpelman 2014:3).

⁶According to La Vine and Zimpelman’s subsistence study, in 2012 the average household income in Kenny Lake was approximately \$34,287, of which earned income comprised an average of \$25,938 (La Vine and Zimpelman 2014:23). Agriculture, forestry and fishing accounted for 8% of earned community income in Kenny Lake/Willow Creek, while the highest percent was from local and tribal governments (35.7%) and 18% from the services sector (Ibid:25).

⁷For information about living independently in the wilderness, see Brown and Gates 2012.

⁸For more about John Barrett and John Blomquist and their role in the founding of McCarthy, see Miller 2011a.

⁹According to Miller (2011a), Barrett and Blomquist joined their homesteads together to establish a town site.

¹⁰There is often confusion about the usage of Kennecott or Kennicott. The mining company was named after the Kennicott Glacier. However, for unknown reasons it was spelled as Kennecott, with an “e.” I have chosen to follow the practice of the National Park Service, where Kennecott is used for the mine and town and Kennicott is used when referring to physical features, such as the river and glacier (Bleakley 2002:10). In quotes from written sources, I have chosen to leave the spelling as written by the original author.

¹¹Ownership of the mine property and control of the Kennecott townsite changed hands a number of times until the National Park Service acquired it in 1997. With each new owner, there were issues over access, preservation versus demolition of structures, and removal of artifacts (Kirchhoff 1993:92-94; Bleakley 2002:51-61).

¹²For a good overview of the people and events in McCarthy and the inner workings of the town from 1963 to 1987, see C. Green 1987.

¹³Maxine Edwards was one of six victims killed in a mass shooting at the McCarthy airstrip on March 1, 1983. Jim Edwards then married his second wife, Pat, who died of cancer ten years later. Not wanting to be alone, Jim married his third wife, Audrey, and they were married for 21 years (Kizzia 2016).

¹⁴For more about Loy and Curtis Green and to read some of their writings, see Loy Green, “My Life and other writings” and Curtis Green, “Recollections Chitina-McCarthy 1963-1987” at <https://livingonunstableground.com/wildlands-policy/curtis-and-loy-green-manuscripts/> (accessed March 8, 2017).

¹⁵For more about Ben Shaine and a list of his publications, see his website: <https://livingonunstableground.com/> (accessed March 8, 2017). For more about the Wrangell Mountains Center, see their website: <http://www.wrangells.org/> (accessed March 8, 2017).

¹⁶ Hastings was apprehended without resistance by the Alaska State Troopers, pleaded no contest to the killings, and was sentenced to 634 years in federal prison which he is serving in Leavenworth, Kansas (“Massacre Survivors Try to Forget McCarthy’s Fateful Day.” *Juneau Empire*, Juneau, Alaska, August 3, 1998. <http://juneauempire.com/stories/080398/massacre.html#.WcLoE1FrwcU>, accessed September 20, 2017.)

¹⁷ “Along with the establishment of the national park one other event occurred that brought the place to public attention. A Kennicott Historic District, the McCarthy general store building and the McCarthy powerhouse were all listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Kennicott is also a National Historical Landmark. The combination of the park and the historic designation generated a number of travel articles both in newspapers and magazines. The dramatic and photogenic fourteen-story mill building has made an appearance in illustrated books on Alaska and in a widely-circulated poster. The National Trust for Historic Preservation, a prestigious national organization, has put the Kennecott mines on its list of most-endangered places” (Sax 1990:8).

¹⁸ For more about the McCarthy Area Council, issues they have dealt with, and how the group is organized, see Vail 2016.

¹⁹ Blazo was the primary fuel in those days for lanterns and cook stoves. It used to come in two five-gallon cans packaged in a sturdy wooden box. The boxes were highly-prized, as they served a multitude of purposes ranging from storage containers to bookcases to kitchen cabinets. Blazo Box decor was definitely de rigueur.

²⁰ According to Henning et al., the 1964 earthquake destroyed the bridge approaches (1981:40). But according to Kenny Smith, “There was somebody, like to say, that the Nizina Bridge collapsed in the earthquake. Well, it might have had some damage or something, but we were flying the DC-3 in there. We were coming over from McCarthy after that because the new McCarthy airstrip was kind of soggy in a couple of places. If we had heavy rains, it was not very good for the DC-3” (Smith 2016). Perhaps Henning is referring to other bridges besides just the one over the Nizina River between May Creek and McCarthy?

²¹ During a 1994 oral history interview with former Kennecott employee, Nels Konnerup, NPS historian Logan Hovis mentions that a man was living in the angle station. Tim talks about his life at the angle station in episodes of the TV show “Edge of Alaska” on the Discovery Channel, available at: <http://www.discovery.com/tv-shows/edge-of-alaska/> (accessed November 30, 2016). For more about the history of the aerial tramways in Kennecott, see *Kennecott Aerial Tramways, National Park Service Cultural Landscape Inventory*, 2015. Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, Alaska Regional Office, Cultural Landscapes Program, 2015. Available at <https://www.nps.gov/wrst/learn/historyculture/kennecott-clr.htm> (accessed November 30, 2016).

²² For more about Fred Denner and his photography business “Alaska Wilderness Prints,” see his website: <http://freddenner.photos/> (accessed November 30, 2016).

²³ In his book, *Pilgrim’s Wilderness*, Tom Kizzia mentions a Brother Ivey coming to Chitina: “Long after the mines closed, however, the area did attract an end-of-the-world sect when a religious leader named Brother Ivy moved to Chitina with his followers, bought the Chitina Cash Store and renamed it the Light House Mission, and assembled a windowless log house in anticipation of the big finale in April 1976” (Kizzia 2013:47). Curtis Green also mentions Brother Ivey in his unpublished memoir: “When the world did not end as scheduled, the clan members gradually faded away. Brother Ivey and his wife remained and eventually opened a small grocery store/gas station on the edge of town” (C. Green 1987:30). But Curtis goes on to mention that “his wife was a recluse and never waited on customers” (Ibid). This is different from how Mark Vail represents his experience with Mrs. Ivey when he shopped at their Chitina Cash Store in the 1990s. According to Mark, “My experiences with Mrs. Ivey all occurred after Mr. Ivey passed away. After both elder Iveys died, their store was sold to a young fellow from Valdez, but it burnt to the ground before he could open it the following

season” (email to author, March 7, 2017). Mark Vail also tried to clarify the confusion about the stores between his account and those of Green and Kizzia. Apparently, there were two Chitina Cash Stores. The original one was owned by O.A. Nelson and was a railroad era building about one block from the tracks. The Iveys’ gas station and store, also called the Chitina Cash Store, came later and was in a different place. It was about three or four blocks away from the railroad tracks, which in the 1960s when Green wrote about it would have been on the outskirts of town. After the Iveys’ store burned down, Nelson’s original Chitina Cash Store building was demolished and the Light House Mission church was built on that site (Ibid).

²⁴ The National Register nomination form is available at <https://npgallery.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/79003763> (accessed December 15, 2017).

²⁵ For more about the gallery, go to their webpage at <http://www.spiritmountainalaska.com/index.html> (accessed December 15, 2017).

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS AND DATA GAPS

It was always difficult to make a living in the Wrangell-St. Elias region. In the past, like now, game was scarce and permanent jobs were practically non-existent. As a result only the most persistent and adaptable individuals stayed in the vicinity very long. Some, however, spent much of their lives here, and their legacy deserves greater recognition (Bleakley n.d.a:1).

THE WRANGELLS AS HOME

This report provides an opportunity to learn about what life has been like for long-term residents of the region who came from elsewhere in search of economic opportunity, personal freedom, or a new start. They found a place they could call home in the Wrangell Mountains, the Copper River Basin, the upper Tanana River valley, or in the coastal community of Yakutat. Despite the hardships and dangers of establishing trails across glaciers, raging rivers, or steep cliffs, drilling mining tunnels and blasting rock, carving out a homestead from the thick forest, and finding sustenance in an often sparse world, it has also been a place of welcoming neighbors. The key to acceptance was sticking around long enough to prove that you had the necessary grit of a true frontiersman. In describing life on the Alaskan frontier generally, Laurel Tyrrell wrote, “Brushes with danger are accepted as part of this lifestyle and illustrate the pride these people feel in having confronted a life-threatening situation, and having survived it” (Tyrrell 2002:41).

Many came and went from the Wrangell-St. Elias area, especially in the peak days of mining when men frequently moved from place to place in search of better mineral deposits or higher paying jobs. But many others fell in love with the beauty of the mountains or with the lifestyle and firmly planted themselves in place. They preferred to live in a small community because it offered privacy, peace and solitude, and a low crime rate, and was a place where they could develop deep friendships with like-minded, down-to-earth people. In addition, the location provided access to a broad range of recreation and subsistence opportunities. They made a life for themselves through a mixture of activities, including working for wages, hunting, fishing, gardening, visiting neighbors and friends, making handicrafts for sale, going to church, and volunteering for civic organizations like Veterans of Foreign Wars, Chamber of Commerce, or the women’s club (Haynes 1984). Residents come from many different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and educational levels and mix together irrespective of these categories or their age. In his 1984 study of rural aging in the upper Tanana region, Terry Haynes describes the non-Native community he encountered that still applies today:

Most of the early day pioneers lived frugally and were involved at least peripherally in gold mining activities. ...others considered the region the best home they ever had and felt no desire to readjust to the rapidly-changing world outside Alaska. ...Most of the early day white elders were unmarried men, although a few brought spouses and some took Native wives following their arrival. Whether men or women, they had all the characteristics of pioneers everywhere: proud and stubborn, determined and independent (Ibid:43).

This report clearly demonstrates that small-scale miners, trappers, sport hunting guides, and homesteaders are non-Native occupational groups traditionally associated with Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. The question remains whether pilots should also qualify as a traditionally associated occupational group who has “been associated with a park for two or more generations (40 years), and whose interests in the park’s resources began before the park’s establishment” (US DOI NPS 2006:70). Aviation has played a major role in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, and many pilots



Copper River settler, circa 1900. Alaska State Library, Alaska Lantern Slides Collection, ASL-P208-090.

have links to long-standing traditions and a stake in how park resources are managed. While being a Wrangell-St. Elias area pilot in the past generally was done in association with one of these other occupations, leading some to think that being a pilot is not a stand-alone occupation, in more recent times there are people who have come to the region specifically for economic reasons to work as a pilot for one of the local charter or larger air service companies. Some have made this their permanent home. In addition, by providing transportation links between Wrangell-St. Elias communities and with the rest of Alaska and by bringing recreational users to the national park and preserve, pilots positively contribute to the regional society and have a vested interest in what happens in both the region and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. They deserve to be consulted on equal footing with their neighbors.

Despite the different time periods and various occupational groups discussed in this report, three main themes appear to be common throughout. One is the importance of access to resources and land. Second is the fluidity of identity and employment. And third is connection to place.

ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND LAND

Being able to get to land and the resources it provides are essential for making a successful living off the land, whether from hunting and fishing, trapping, mining, farming or homesteading. Access and transportation have been critical for everyone living in the Wrangell-St. Elias area no matter what the time period. For the first non-Native explorers, it was navigating new terrain and rugged mountainous country. Then it was roughing out and maintaining regular trails for travelers, freighters, hunters and trappers to follow. Completion of the Copper River and Northwestern Railway in 1911 made entry from the coast into Kennecott, McCarthy, Chitina and the Copper River valley easier and led to a relative population boom in these communities as well as in the more remote mining camps whose residents now only had to walk, drive a dog sled or ride horses from the rail line. Their journey was made significantly shorter. The same was true for access into the northern and eastern mountains and creeks when the Nabesna Road was completed in 1934. Today, the McCarthy and Nabesna Roads are heavily utilized arteries bringing residents and visitors alike into the heart of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

By the 1930s, access became even easier with the advent of airplanes as a safe, fast and effective means of transport. “Not only were airplanes a vital link for communities choosing to live at the edge of the managed world, but in terms of function and distinctiveness, airplanes provided the essential cohesive quality that gave the Wrangell Mountain communities their frontier identity” (Ringsmuth 2015:172). When the park was established, the use of airplanes became a point of contention between those who relied upon them as their primary means of transportation and those who were concerned about the impact of airplanes on what they considered to be “pristine wilderness.” “By transporting people to places that before had been deemed inaccessible, environmentalists saw bush pilots as playing a primary role in expanding the human footprint into those untouched areas” (Ibid:175). This latter perspective failed to take into account the preceding long human history spread out across the landscape that is still dotted with small hand-made airstrips and gravel bar landing areas. As late as 1983, Holly Reckord observed that about half of the fifteen family homesteads she saw along the McCarthy Road had access to their own airplanes (Reckord 1983a:232). Today’s private pilots and commercial bush pilots still fly over a wilderness landscape and continue to transport people into Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. Those with commercial use authorizations are allowed to fly visitors, hikers and rafters, guides and hunters, as well as residents, in and out of the park and land on some of the remaining remote airstrips. ANILCA Section 1110 specifically authorizes the use of aircraft for access for traditional activities.

With the passage of ANILCA, one of the management issues facing the newly established park was what means of access would be allowed. While access by airplane, as mentioned above, or snowmachine are addressed in park rules and regulations, the use of off-road vehicles (ORVs) or all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) became particularly contentious. Prior to establishment of the park and preserve, individuals who owned property in Chisana used ATVs to hunt and to access Gold Hill (Larson 1998) and a variety of off-road vehicles were used for access off the Nabesna Road (US DOI NPS 2011; Happe et al. 1998). Over time, some people have felt that ATVs had the potential to cause more physical damage to the environment than snowmachines, which tend to be utilized when the ground is frozen and there is snow cover to protect vegetation, and advocated for ATVs to be regulated differently. By the mid-1980s, the park developed a General Management Plan and started to restrict ATV use in accordance with ANILCA and differentiate between subsistence and recreational users (Bleakley 2002; Norris 2002). The park service continues to conduct studies and institute regulations to address potential impacts and ensure that critical resources are protected.¹ For example, the Nabesna Road remains popular with recreationalists and sport and subsistence hunters, and through the years it seems that ATVs and ORVs have become the preferred mode transportation for accessing areas away from the road. One possible explanation for this is that humans are always looking for



Mrs. Iverson and MaryAnn standing on a pile of hay on a wagon at the Iverson farm located a few miles outside of McCarthy, circa 1926. Courtesy of Eleanor Tjosevig and Dick Anderson.

easier ways to do things, so when possible we will select motorized transportation over walking or using horses. Therefore, as ATVs and ORVs have become more readily available and affordable, more people are using them. In order to address this, in 2011 the NPS completed an Off Road Vehicle Management Plan for the park's Nabesna District. In 2014, they published regulations that designate certain trails for recreational ORV use and put in place specific rules for ORV use in order to protect park resources (Happe et al. 1998; US DOI NPS 2011; US DOI NPS 2014).

While being able to get to the resources is one part of the story, being able to utilize what is there is another. This includes being able to hunt wild game, mine the minerals you find, clear land for a homestead, or trap furbearers along a hand-cut trail. In addition to the official government rules and regulations about harvesting wildlife and mining, there are also a series of unwritten rules about use of trapline trails, sustainable harvesting, respecting private property, and staying off other people's mining claims. Through the years, there have been conflicts over access to animal populations for hunting like control of and limits on big game guiding and subsistence regulations, or the impacts of mining, especially once Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve was established and began to impose new management regulations. The mixing of traditional subsistence with recreational hunters and professional outfitters has not always been easy. Conflict over types of hunting and access have been expressed by Native and non-Native residents throughout the park ranging from the Copper Basin down to Yakutat (Defenderfer and Walkinshaw 1981; Conkle and Rearden 1991; Hunt 1996; Conkle 1997; Deur et al. 2015; Justin 2015; DeHart 2016; Knutson 2016).

In addition, the availability of undeveloped land has been essential for those who homesteaded from the early 1900s to the 1980s in Chisana, Kenny Lake, McCarthy, Chitina, Long Lake, Tanada Lake, Nabesna, or Slana. These hardy folks found their calling in clearing and working the land, in raising animals, or in growing crops. They could not have done this without the availability of land or being able to acquire private property, as well as having good transportation corridors for moving their



Deyo Homestead near Chitina, Alaska, circa 1930. Courtesy of Dick Anderson and Susan Gilpatrick.

harvests or products to market. Many of the men and women who arrived in the 1960s, '70s and '80s based their entire identities and existence on this notion of living sustainably off the land and off the grid. Living in isolated wilderness was a dream come true and they fought a number of political battles to ensure their futures – some as environmentalists to protect the land and resources as a park, others to maintain a lifestyle they felt was being threatened by park establishment.

No matter one's political leanings, it is of primary importance to those living in and near Wrangell-St. Elias National Park that they be able to continue their land-based and multi-faceted lifestyles. They will continue to speak out about limits they feel the National Park Service is putting on them unnecessarily, the importance of park protections and regulations, being able to cross federal land to reach private inholdings, or to hunt or trap according to their traditions.

FLUIDITY AND ADAPTATION

For many people who came to live in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, staying required adaptation. It has never been an easy place to survive, even in the heyday of mining and trapping. For those who wished to remain, they had to change with the time and utilize a variety of skills to find ways to make a living. "This ability to confront new experiences with creative solutions is a hallmark of this lifestyle" (Tyrrell 2002:45). No one activity lasted all year or was reliable enough or financially successful enough to serve as your whole livelihood. Men may have arrived as gold prospectors, but during the winter months, when their claims did not produce, or if the mine they worked for shut down, they still needed to earn a living, so they found other occupations. Maybe they became trappers. Maybe they got jobs working on the railroad. Maybe they became pilots. Or they may have been making a fine living as trappers, selling their furs to the local trading post, but as the price of fur dropped in the world market, the demand decreased, there were fewer local places to sell the fur, and by the 1950s this was no longer a viable occupation. Trappers had to find something else to be. Some, like Dean Wilson Sr., became fur buyers. Others found summer employment on road construction crews, with

the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, in tourism, as carpenters, or commercial fishing out of Valdez or Cordova. Or maybe they used their knowledge of the land and animals to work as hunting guides in the fall.

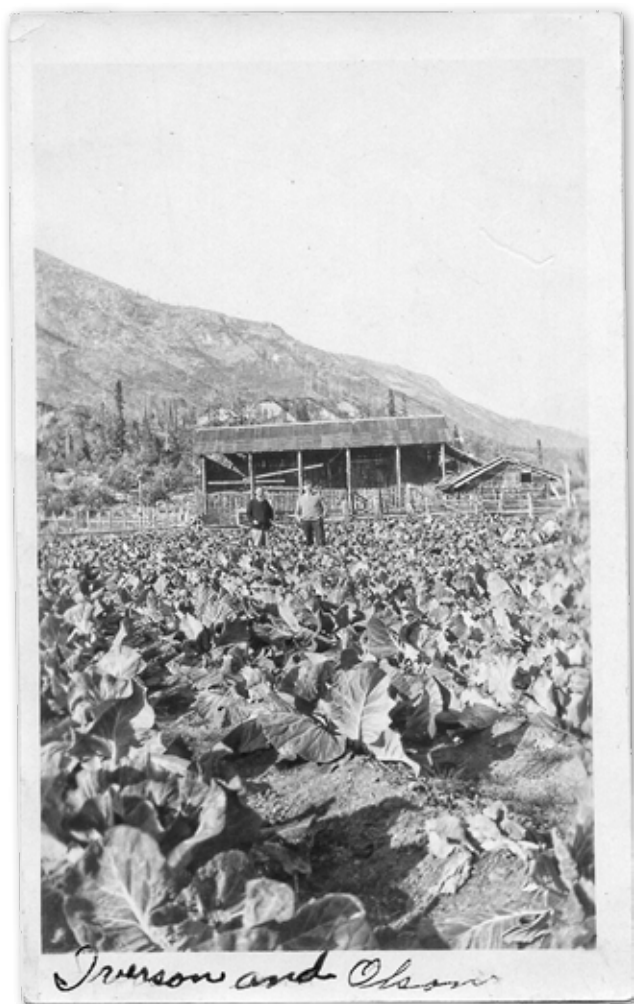
Even today, many area residents have jobs that change with the seasons. It used to be mining in the summer, guiding sport hunters in the fall and spring, and trapping in the winter. Now it might be guiding fishermen or hikers, operating a bed and breakfast, raising some crops and animals in the summer and leaving for a city job in the winter, or working on a road construction crew in the summer and trapping in the winter. Those who run businesses today, such as an old roadhouse or a gas station, are more able to keep things running all year round than in earlier periods, due to a higher population, more people owning cars and snowmachines for which they need to purchase gas, and more traffic along the road system.

The regional lifestyle and economic patterns have changed in accordance with larger state and national shifts. For instance, with the crash of the world fur market in the 1930s and 1940s, trapping nearly disappeared as a livelihood. In the 1940s, World War II brought increased opportunities for employment in road and airstrip construction. And in the 1970s, construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline created many jobs for local residents and injected massive amounts of cash into the area. By some estimates, more than 60 percent of the men in the Copper Basin region at the time worked on jobs related to the pipeline (Henning et al. 1981:134). The region experienced another shift at the beginning of the 1980s with a sudden downturn in the local economy:

Abrupt termination of pipeline activity, combined with what has been a continual decline in recreational travel on the Alaska Highway and Tok Cutoff [sic], has severely affected the local economy. (Increasing use of self-contained vehicles by travelers has further depressed the roadhouse-lodging industry.) Unemployment is high. Hopes for sustaining the economy and services generated by the pipeline have now largely been dashed. On the other hand, there is reticence, and probably an inability, to return to the pre-pipeline economic base and activities. The region lacks a good economic foundation and, beset as it is by land selection uncertainty, the future, while potentially bright, remains clouded (Henning et al. 1981:134).

Most current residents live in a mixed cash and subsistence economy, where they rely on a mutually dependent combination of temporary, often seasonal, employment opportunities and hunting, fishing, gathering, and gardening. Nobody gets 100 percent of their food needs met through subsistence anymore. Even those with the highest levels of subsistence harvest buy things like flour, oats, sugar, coffee and tea. Nevertheless, subsistence continues to be extremely important to rural residents.² Recent household survey data for most of the Copper Basin and Upper Tanana communities indicate average harvest levels of 100 to 300 pounds of wild foods per person per year (Holen et al. 2012; Kukkonen and Zimpelman 2012; La Vine et al. 2013; La Vine and Zimpelman 2014; Holen et al. 2015; Godduhn and Kostick 2016), compared to a much smaller amount (19 pounds per person) for urban residents (Fall 2016:2). “Subsistence is therefore a vital part of the economy in rural Alaska communities in maintaining the ability of residents to continue living in areas where jobs are harder to come by and costs of living are higher” (D. Holen in Aslaksen et al. 2009:80). Another key element in this mixed economic livelihood is a network of sharing and exchange that has been described as “culturally embedded social relationships sustained by flows of wild food and other resources” (BurnSilver et al. 2016). In this way, a single household does not become the sole provider of its subsistence and related resources, but is instead one element within a larger interconnected system.

Employment is often with school districts, state and federal government agencies, utility companies, and supply services along the highway, such as stores, gas stations, or roadhouses. Money is needed to buy fuel, pay for utilities, and purchase food and basic supplies. People employ different



Mr. Iverson and Mr. Olson in the cabbage patch at the Iverson farm located a few miles outside of McCarthy, circa 1920. Courtesy of Eleanor Tjosevig and Dick Anderson.

major river systems. People came in search of gold and copper deposits. People came to hunt the wealth and diversity of wild animals. People came as pilots, guides or businessmen. People came to have their own small piece of Alaska wilderness on which to build a home, raise a family, and grow and harvest their own food. Others were drawn to this place, searching for peace, freedom, wilderness, and a chance to re-create themselves. And then others chose an uncommon way of life to consciously break the boundaries of social conformity. All of these types of people continue to live in the Wrangell-St. Elias area and throughout Alaska, many going about their daily lives relatively unseen by outsiders.

Chosen through a different set of criterion, the food they eat, the clothes they wear, the homes they build, and the jobs they hold, are not standard urban fare. They do not fit an urban mold. The guidelines they follow and the values they express are fashioned to fit the setting in which they choose to carry out their lives. Buying the newest car or look alike home on the block is not appealing to this group of people (Tyrrell 2002:81).

strategies for producing supplemental income. Many work seasonal jobs such as guiding, mining, tourism, construction, road work, pipeline or oil industry, or commercial fishing. Some are artists and sell handicrafts, photographs, or writing. Others sell fur from trapping. While still others have good investments that provide sufficient annual return (Reckord 1983a). "Long work weeks lead to less time for subsistence, although higher incomes provide the necessary means to pay for the equipment which allows for the traditional subsistence economy to continue into the future" (D. Holen in Aslaksen et. al 2009:81).

So although the types of activities have changed since the early frontier days, the lifestyle of long-term non-Native Wrangell-St. Elias area residents remains focused on living according to the seasons, working a variety of jobs, finding ways for the land to provide either by hunting, gardening or farming, and perhaps at times being willing to sometimes live without. For most, the beauty and character of the place make these challenges worth it.

SENSE OF PLACE

The Wrangell-St. Elias area has a long history of human occupation from the initial Native occupations around 10,000 years ago to the influx of non-Natives that started after the late 1800s when the first non-Natives began making exploratory forays up the

This choice to seek out the “last frontier” is culturally and historically consistent with American traditions. With the notion that the “last frontier” encompasses concepts of individual liberty, self-reliance, and ideals of freedom it coincides with “Frederick Jackson Turner’s premise that the formation of the American personality is rooted in the existence of the frontier” (Ibid:118-119). This sense of freedom is a common theme among non-Natives who have ended up settling in the Wrangell-St. Elias area. In her book, *The Frontier Romance*, Judith Kleinfeld discusses how the power of this frontier myth as a shared cultural narrative and the subsequent freedom fantasy have driven the actions of many Alaskans to seek the wilderness (Kleinfeld 2012). For many, this frontier romance fueled a leap into adventure. For others, it has given meaning to and validated actions that they might not otherwise be able to explain. As Kleinfeld writes:

The frontier narrative is one of America’s cultural treasures, creating the psychological scaffolding for freedom. It is a narrative that fuels both conventional ambition and rebellion from convention. It is a narrative that tells us how much freedom we have if only we will use it. It is a narrative that tells us to live deliberately, to gather our courage and take the risk, to face the danger, to seize freedom rather than fear it, and to feel the rush of the wind in our hair (Ibid:xxii).

Beyond just the formation of the American personality, this frontier lifestyle has a more subtle influence on individuals that is perhaps less commonly recognized but is deeply important to those who experience it. It allows for personal growth and self-discovery that might not be accomplished in a more urban setting. For some, this can be the main motivation underlying their choice to seek out remote Alaskan living and has altered the focus of their life.

The challenges and adventures of living this Alaskan lifestyle helps one to grow and perhaps find themselves to have more strength, endurance, character, and motivation within themselves than they knew they possessed. Facing danger, surviving it through their own resources, relying upon their personal talents to provide basic necessities of living, and successfully carrying out daily interactions with the natural world provide the experiences through which they learn who they are and what they are capable of. Most discover themselves to be more capable than they ever dreamed (Tyrrell 2002:43).

Long-term residents of the Wrangell-St. Elias area have personal reasons for staying, but connection to place is a standard refrain. No matter what occupational group they are part of, people are strongly attached to their land-based and self-reliant lifestyle. They express a deep love for the region, its natural beauty, the people, and their ability to live how they want. They clearly fit into Tyrrell’s description of frontier Alaskans:

With their small homes, family run businesses, wild harvest meals, and low levels of materialistic consumption, the lifestyle of these people can be viewed as an effort to live in an ecologically sustainable manner. It is not articulated as the focus of their ideals, but generally they live within the environment’s capacity. With a slower more reflective approach to existence, they exemplify a striving for quality in life. Trying to earn a livelihood in the land while maintaining a relationship with the natural world they are actively involved in changing man’s relationship to nature. They love the natural environment and strive to make it part of their everyday living, not a weekend excursion. Ideals of relying upon oneself instead of social regimes, using items of

utility rather than fashion, freedom from convention and binding doctrines, and close family relationships are integrated with every aspect of their lives. Their life is an experiment in blending together nature, everyday experiences, work, and a simpler life of substance (Ibid:94).

In contrast, sometimes there is conflict as not all interactions among neighbors and other members of the community are calm, reasonable, or without friction. Neighbors argue, fight, and some even hold long-term grudges (Tyrrell 2002). Despite disputes that might occasionally escalate into violence, during a crisis most people put aside their conflicts and come to each other's aide. "Without any formal system to count upon during stressful situations, these people participate in a system of helpfulness, hospitality, and sharing" (Ibid:71).

No matter the time period, any non-Native newcomer moving into the Wrangell-St. Elias area wanted to gain acceptance by those already living there. Long-time residents in either Native or non-Native communities, often distance themselves from newcomers. They wait to see how long the cheechako (new arrival) will last, if at all. Gaining acceptance is based on proving that you have the chops to survive the tough demands of a wilderness-based life, but developing friendships and relationships are equally important (Summers 2016). The most important steps to follow include: being humble and willing to commit to and learn a new way of life; respecting existing traditions; being willing to work hard; being friendly and neighborly; doing all you can to be connected with other people; and understanding that you need to help others, because one day you might need that help yourself. By following these practices, non-Natives have been able to successfully establish themselves in the Wrangell-St. Elias area and have become an integral part of the region's social milieu. Choosing to ignore these, however, can lead to isolation and subsequent higher risk of failure as a wilderness settler.

While people still show up to help one another when a creek floods, there is a forest fire, a bear breaks in, or to haul supplies to a cabin at the beginning of a season, the region has undergone social and cultural change similar to other parts of American society. As Margot Higgins relates from an interview she conducted with an unidentified outfitter for her Ph.D. dissertation *From Copper to Conservation: The Politics of Wilderness, Cultural, and Natural Resources in Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park and Preserve*:

From late '70s on there was a natural filter: people need to work hard to be here. Hardship was the glue that bounded people together. People were forced to interact with those they do not like. This has changed in the last ten years. We are moving into the third generation. We are at a crux time. Now it is easier to be here. You do not need to be nice to your neighbors. There are more cliques (Higgins 2015:54).

Living on a remote homestead surrounded by wilderness or in a small rural community is not for everyone. It is a hard life. Some have come and tried and failed. Whether in the 1930s, when Alaska offered a shining future and an escape from economic hardship in the Lower 48, or the 1970s when back-to-nature'ists sought an escape from what they considered to be a wasteful and superficial society, those who failed usually left. This same experimentation and in and out migration continues to this day.

Since the early 1990s, there has been a substantial out-migration of the permanent population from this area. Poor fishing seasons, the rising cost of food and fuel, reduced state spending on schools, roads and other maintenance are among the reasons that were stated by the people I interviewed. Despite outmigration and a low population

density, tourism has greatly increased in recent years, as have the numbers of seasonal homeowners and investors (Higgins 2015: 23).

Since the 1980s, more recreational or seasonal residents have moved into communities within and adjacent to the park. This includes those with summer cabins in places such as McCarthy that they visit periodically, or retired urban residents following their dream of living in the Alaska bush but who still want to be on the road system for easy access to the city (Reckord 1983a:185). This has changed the social dynamics where short-timers have a different connection to the place than the settlers. As Higgins states:

Wrangell-St. Elias is increasingly an “emerging rural landscape” where the goals of capital investment are no longer limited to the fur trade and mining natural resource commodities of the past. The area now attracts investments for tourism, housing development, and continued environmental conservation (Ibid: 24).

The increase in tourism is especially visible in McCarthy with its steady stream of visitors wandering the streets in the summer, more and more bed and breakfast accommodations sprouting up, and the always-crowded café serving fresh espresso drinks and craft beer. The Nabesna Road is also seeing an increase in traffic as word spreads about this being an easy way to access the treasures of the Wrangell Mountains. Tourism may provide more opportunities in the future for people who want to come and live in the Wrangell-St. Elias area in keeping with its historic and subsistence-based past, but still have a way to earn a living in a wage-based economy.

In addition, fewer young people these days seem up to the task of staking a claim to a piece of wild Alaska. They may be attracted to the adventure of Alaska, but they are less willing to live without the amenities of running water, electricity, or high-speed Internet than were their predecessors, many of whom came from a rural background or a life closer in time to that of the pioneering frontiersmen. Or today’s youth may be less interested in putting in the truly hard work required to clear land, build a cabin, plant a crop or raise animals, collect and split firewood, cut and maintain a trapline trail, set traps and check them regularly no matter how cold or snowy or dark it is, hunt, fish and pick berries, and process the harvest. The population of the Wrangell-St. Elias area has shifted accordingly. Fewer people are coming. Ironically, this may be just fine with those who came before and have paid their dues with hard work and hardship. They were attracted to the peace and quiet of remote living and not having neighbors close-by. They really do not want more people coming in.

CULTURAL INTEGRATION

Non-Natives in the Wrangell-St. Elias area have not lived in isolation. When they first arrived they relied heavily upon Native residents for help with hunting, trapping, and survival. While some non-Natives eventually established themselves out on the land or homesteaded on private property, others developed communities, like McCarthy or Chitina and opened businesses like roadhouses, stores, gas stations, restaurants, saloons, hotels, flying and/or guiding services, mail or freight delivery operations, and more recently tourist services. However, these were not the only communities in the region. Non-Natives also settled alongside their Native neighbors in Native villages, such as Yakutat, Gakona, Gulkana, Mentasta, Nabesna, Tanacross and Northway, and in mixed race communities like Copper Center, Glennallen, Chisana, and Tok. In some cases, these newcomers married into Native families. In other cases they came for jobs, such as with the military, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) flight services, road construction, or building the pipeline. Like the miners before them, it was not typical for the men who came for these jobs to stay around after the work was done. But some did. And the ones that have stayed the longest are the ones that have immersed themselves in the culture

and traditions of their Native neighbors, made life-long friendships, and have committed themselves as devoted members of the community, always being willing to help when needed.

There are more non-Natives in the Wrangell-St. Elias area today than there used to be, and in more concentrated locales, but even as late as 1948 when Lavell Wilson was a boy and arrived in Northway from Oregon, there still were not many non-Natives in the villages. His parents had a store and later the Northway Hotel, and his father did some trapping.

When we first moved up to Northway, the white population was very small. I remember when we moved there was one other family, the James family, that was white and not employed by the government. They had an FAA station at Northway that had probably thirty white people working there. And the school teacher was white. That was about it. The Native population of the village, I would say, was under 200. Not very big. Not as big as Tanacross. Total I'd say there were only 250 people who lived in the whole area here at the most. And it was 90 percent Native (Wilson 2013).

The Wilson family is a good example of outsiders who developed good relationships with and were accepted by Native residents. Lavell's father became trapping partners with Oscar Albert of Northway. Both Lavell and his brother, Dean, learned trapping from Native elders in Northway and both grew up to be very successful trappers. Dean married an Upper Tanana woman and learned her cultural traditions. And Dean and Lavell's mother made her own cross-cultural connections by helping families. As Lavell said:

She got along good with some of the Native women. Ada Albert was one of her closest friends. And she took in several of the Native kids. When I was going to high school, she kept a couple of them around a little time and they stayed with us. And are still real good friends. She liked it there. She was pretty adaptable (Ibid).

And, of course, non-Natives in the Wrangell-St. Elias area always have come from a variety of places with diverse backgrounds and cultures. "The immigrant filled the work rosters of the railroad and mines with the skilled labor necessary to accomplish the mammoth endeavors of the C.R. & N.W. Railroad and Kennicott Mines" (Miller 2011b). During the prospecting days, men came from Croatia, Serbia, Albania, Greece, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, England, Germany, and France, just to name a few.

The population was enormously diverse. Chinese, Blacks and European immigrants were all present. ...Native people had long suffered the American expansion. Athabascans too endured rather demeaning verbiage and charitable causes but on the whole, little public animosity seems to have been expressed in McCarthy. Perhaps, because McCarthy was inhabited by few Athabascans there were fewer tensions. However the rowdy mining crowd was an unending source of concern for townsfolk, but the merchants of McCarthy happily suffered through many a miner's paycheck. Grubstaking a prospector down on his funds was a common if not risky practice (Ibid).

There also were some black miners in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, like Tom Temple who prospected in 1898 between Klutina and Tazlina Lakes (Bleakley 2006:119), and George Flowers who arrived at George Hazelet's mining camp on the Chisana River and later lived at Long Lake and worked on the Copper River and Northwestern Railway (Ibid:39). However, during World War II, African-American men played a large role in construction of the Alaska Highway and had an influence as non-Natives in

the Wrangell-St. Elias region, thereby complicating what it meant to be non-Native (Morgan 1992). Even though in some cases, these may have been the first black men Native villagers saw (Wilson 2008), for the most part, all of these non-Native ethnicities were treated the same. More important than ethnic or racial background was one's ability to work hard and survive the rugged life. There was more of a differentiation between sourdough (old-timer) and cheechako (new arrival) than country of origin.

Also, as previously mentioned, Yakutat's long history of non-Native contact and settlement has been written about extensively (Deur et al. 2015; de Laguna 1972; Ehrlander 2014). It is a checkered past that starts with battles to run out the invaders, includes contact with missionaries and the influence of the commercial fishing industry and the military, and ends in generalized cross-cultural acceptance and cohabitation. The experience of Clarence Summers, who is African-American and was the first NPS ranger stationed in Yakutat after the park was established, serves as a useful example of a non-Native outsider integrating into a small Alaskan community associated with Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. Clarence experienced animosity when he first arrived in 1981. From Clarence's perspective, this was because he was a NPS employee and local residents and guides were afraid that he was there to regulate and limit their hunting and fishing activities, rather than the fact that he was non-Native or African American (Summers 2016). By working hard to connect with people, build relationships, and become a part of the community, Clarence was able to shift this skepticism to acceptance.

When I moved to Yakutat, there were about five, six hundred people living there, full-time residents. The majority of people were Tlingit or a mixture. ...There was a small portion of folks who came into the community either for education, or fishing, or hunting, or if they were guiding, and they stayed. They liked it.

...I got lucky. The city fathers took me in. I also went out of my way to talk with people. ...Another method of socialization I used to get to know people and to be accepted was that I would normally socialize with the local people, like going to community events or dinner get-togethers. In the beginning relations were a little dicey, because there were a lot of unknowns. But over time, there was a tremendous improvement, I thought. A lot of the fears, in my opinion, went away. ...It was tough coming in in the beginning and it took a while. But everything's better now. I think race relations are better. It's just all about relationships (Summers 2016).

RELATIONS WITH THE NATIONAL PARK

Another common experience among all occupational groups in the Wrangell-St. Elias area has been living next to or within a national park. As discussed previously, when Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve was established in 1980, some local residents saw the National Park Service's mission of preserving natural and cultural resources for the enjoyment of future generations as a threat to the area's unique lifestyle and qualities by making it part of a tourist attraction (Catton 1997). They feared the presence of a government institution would restrict their individual freedom and felt that an increase in regulations was an affront to their values. They felt attacked for living a previously admired frontier life and independent lifestyle. They blamed the National Park Service for degradation of their communities (Higgins 2015:54).

Some of the changes to life in the Wrangell-St. Elias area that came with establishment of the park and subsequent new rules and regulations ended up affecting traditionally associated people and occupational groups. For example, sport hunting guides displaced from land newly designated as national park and thus closed to sport hunting, more regulation of mining, and new rules about access for hunting and recreation. These types of regulatory questions are complicated and the

National Park Service and the State of Alaska continue to aim for a balanced approach to management. Nevertheless, this report shows that these types of issues remain critically important to those living in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, and likely will continue to raise debate.

Despite this initial reluctance about having a national park in their backyard, there was fairly broad-based acceptance when people were asked about it in 2016. Although differences remain, it seems that for the most part local residents and the National Park Service have figured out a way to live and work together. People have lived with the park long enough to see there are some benefits, such as tourism, or the expected negative impacts did not materialize. Another reason for better relations is due to the personalities and diligence of various park superintendents and employees through the years who have made it a point to work with and listen to local people and who themselves became long-term residents participating in community events. Some level of mutual understanding and respect has developed on both sides of the aisle. As Margot Higgins noted in 2015:

Throughout my study I have found that residents continually adjust to new forms of circumstances with adaptive behavior and an evolving sense of local knowledge that falls outside of targeted management regimes. In the human communities of the park there is a conglomeration of Native and non-Native Alaskans, old timers, newcomers, people who are there to party, hike and worship. There are people who hunt, trap and fish for subsistence. There are those that lead clients for trophies. There are climbing guides, river guides, field course instructors, federal government officials, permanent residents, second home-owners, and tourists, among others. There are a small number of long-term local park employees that have taken on local practices, and embodied local experiences in the park. On numerous occasions I watched a wide conglomeration of these people, ranging from the federal and state government to predominantly anti-government individuals, sift through complex management decisions together (Higgins 2015:4).

Despite these good relations, cooperation and agreement does not always occur. The lifestyle in a rural place does not always mesh with the standard practices of governmental agencies (Tyrell 2002). What Laurell Tyrell says about remote life in interior Alaska, certainly parallels the experience of some residents in the Wrangell-St. Elias area:

Trying to apply for a permit or harvest ticket it is assumed one has access to e-mail, fax, and copier, or computer technology. Meanwhile the applicant living far from the office may have only very limited access to electricity or even a telephone. ...Bureaucratic institutional clocks run on specific times and are not oriented to adjust to natural cycles (Ibid:105).

This has left many feeling frustrated and helpless that their lives are bound by regulations applied by outsiders that do not understand the place and the lifestyle (Larson 1998; Darish 2016).

The closer the law is to where you live the more relevant it is. The laws that the Park Service want to impart on us, especially 15 years ago, come from Washington, D.C. They have nothing to do with the local needs. So you cannot have people from outside of here commenting and then having those comments turn into facts [that] weigh the same as people that live here. That is the problem today with the Park Service is they are able to come in and have comments from people all over the world as to what is relevant to govern a community of private landowners and their one million

acres, which should be theirs, but apparently there is some confusion. Well, I am not confused about it. I either own land or I don't. And I either have access to it or I don't (Darish 2016).

Hunters, trappers, and self-employed business owners picture themselves as self-reliant entrepreneurs just trying to make a living and maintain a way of life. Many see regulations as restrictive and unfair.

The politics of today, limiting and regulating growth and access to lands and resources would have been the antipathy of the prevalent thinking and desires of McCarthy's early days. While we may be independent thinkers like our forefathers, we do not share the regulatory freedom they had to pursue their dreams. Citizens and small business bear a financial burden today the early residents of Alaska did not (Miller 2011b).

Some people view the National Park Service as prioritizing recreational use over their ability to make a living or participate in subsistence activities. They dislike having the federal government in their backyard. For example, Eric and Nancy Larson in Chisana still felt the sting of the heavy hand of government even after living with the park for eighteen years. As Eric said, "You've got to have a permit for this, and you've got to have a permit for that. You know, it's just more restrictions" (Larson 1998). Nancy expressed her feelings in their 1998 oral history interview:

You have to go farther for sheep, and now that there's been such restricted access with vehicles, that makes it harder and harder to hunt. My impression of the Park Service through the years has been that they really don't want people in their parks. They don't want people living in them. They would prefer to not have the in-holders, and so that's in direct conflict with these people that live there. The sad part of it is that the majority of the people that lived in Chisana respected the land and didn't tear it up, and that's why it's so beautiful and that's why it became a preserve. But to all of a sudden assume that they can no longer respect and take care of the land because it became a preserve is, well, somewhat insulting or frustrating to people that live in the area. ...I think it would be easier to understand such control if there was a large influx of people into the area, and then you say, "Well, we're going to have to do some management here." But because Chisana is a stable population of ten to thirteen people, for how many years, the restrictions placed upon the people that live there are frustrating (Ibid).

Or there is the lingering sentiment expressed by some local residents feeling that even after 37 years since WRST was established the National Park Service still does not like that people live within the park boundaries, such as in McCarthy. That they are more interested in managing for visitors than for locals. In so doing, Neil Darish of McCarthy believes the National Park Service is missing an opportunity to partner with locals who care as much about the land as the managing agency does and so could serve as advocates and help with land stewardship.

When I look back at 15 years ago, the approach that the Park Service would have for the locals felt like, from our perspective, [that] we're in their way. There is no value to having locals here. It is seen as the great harm that can happen. That is the methodology of the Park Service management historically. ...[But] McCarthy is the last bastion for the Park Service to listen and understand that locals represent the humanity of protecting



Eleanor Tjosevig (seated) and Gene Garrity on their one-dog sled in front of J.P. Hubrick's photography studio in McCarthy, circa 1928. Courtesy of Eleanor Tjosevig and Dick Anderson.

the wilderness. By having people actually live in that direct relationship [with nature], we're showing the world that at least it can be done even if most people wouldn't want to do it. ...The people whose lives are here, and everybody else who have their hearts here who really love this place and are passionate about it, have different needs than the people that daydream about here or who come here in the summer alone. ...The Park Service is geared to understanding the mentality of just the people visiting. ...The Park Service has an opportunity to allow a community to thrive and grow into what it is going to be that we don't know yet, [but]...for the Park Service, it is uncomfortable to know they cannot control what a community does (Darish 2016).

The National Park Service has worked hard in recent years to work with neighboring communities to foster positive connections, whether it relates to subsistence and sport hunting regulations, motorized access, mining permits, cabin and trail maintenance, or hiring more local people. It is hoped that these good relationships will continue to develop and grow in the future.

AN INHABITED WILDERNESS

While much has been written about the innovative national park concept in Alaska that combined resource conservation with use, this is not always well understood by the general population who view national parks with a Lower 48 lens and expect them to be some sort of "pristine wilderness" (Lappen 1984; Catton 1997; Allan 2010; Nash 2014). The purpose of this Ethnographic Overview and

Assessment was a desire by the National Park Service to pursue its dual mandate and recognize the contributions of traditionally associated people and occupational groups to the cultural personality and economic character of the park and the region. The National Park Service has further recognized the Wrangell-St. Elias landscape as an inhabited wilderness in its recent publication of *At Work in the Wrangells: A Photographic History, 1895-1966* (Ringsmuth 2016) that focuses on economic circumstances as being the primary reason why non-Native people moved into the area.

Work in the Wrangells, then, provides a common thread that connects human populations and their changing “economic circumstances” through time and place. As a conceptual framework, work informs us as to how Alaska Natives came to know the transforming land and dealt with the transition to the fur trade and later, a cash economy; how humans created innovative and technologically impressive transportation and communications networks in order to adapt to and overcome natural barriers; how newcomers built a recognizable society in a completely foreign environment... (Ibid:2).

Ringsmuth further argues that people came to know the Wrangell-St. Elias area by being immersed in it through work:

People came to know the commanding Wrangell landscape through back-breaking, and at times, deadly labor that the rivers, glaciers, and mountains demanded of them. They caught and killed salmon, harvested timber and harnessed the power and animals and water. They endured the relentless heat in summer and the frigid cold in winter. They labored against the deceptive flow of braided river currents and navigated the dangers of glacier crevasses and mountain trails. They read the landscape to find water, food and shelter. ...Through these laborious interactions, humans created knowledge of the Wrangell’s world and forged a deep connection to it (Ibid:3-4).

McCarthy in particular grew up as a center of commerce to support Kennecott, Chisana and the entire Nizina District. Mining, freighting, mercantile and agriculture were in abundance and provided work and economic opportunities for the many non-Natives entering the region in the 1910s, ‘20s and ‘30s.

McCarthy’s’ settlers made assumptions that the community they were carving from this wilderness might go on to affluence, into the future. They had come a long way to settle here and for many years thought prosperity and stability were possible. Land ownership was foremost in their minds to achieve this. Catch phrases such as “view sheds” and “scenic corridors” would not have been pertinent to our forefathers. ...They would not have understood the concept of not utilizing mineral and renewable resources if it was possible profitably (Miller 2011b).

Not everyone came to or stayed in the Wrangell Mountains region for economic reasons. Some like the prospectors or those working in the large mines, those building the railroad, those who flew airplanes, or those who guided sport hunters came to make a living. But others were drawn by the majesty of the mountains, the magnificent beauty of the wide river valleys, or the solitude of the vast wilderness – people like Slim Williams who had seen the mountains from afar when he was freighting supplies over the Valdez Glacier for gold miners and was drawn to one day explore them further on

his own, or Frank and Sue Entsminger who were looking for a quiet place to live in the woods away from the fast-paced life of the city.

Residents view themselves as outdoorsmen who enjoy the wilderness and spend innumerable hours there. The love of the beauty and unspoiled condition of the natural environment is one of the original reasons they were drawn to this place and remains a fundamental element of what keeps them here. A major reason they moved away from urban situations was to be close to natural rhythms and wild places (Tyrrell 2002:1).

These people came for the location, and then found a way to make a living so that they could continue to live in a place they loved, instead of vice versa as Ringsmuth suggests was the norm. No matter why you came, it is true that “the Wrangell’s remoteness and inaccessibility shaped and organized its work culture” (Ringsmuth 2016:5).

The final question that remains is what the future holds for the people of the Wrangell-St. Elias area. As in other parts of Alaska, and in earlier time periods, people living this lifestyle fear they are an endangered species (Tyrrell 2002). Certainly, it is easier to live in the region nowadays than it used to be. There are local state-funded schools so most children do not need to be sent out to boarding schools or be homeschooled. There are good roads that have been maintained by the State of Alaska all year round that allow for better travel between communities and to Anchorage or Fairbanks. Better transportation has brought formerly isolated people together into a broad framed network. Families and friends can more easily get to each other’s homes for visiting, into town for groceries or supplies, to the local lodge for a drink or a meal, or to the community hall for a social event. There are more and higher paying jobs available in the area including road construction and maintenance, government agencies, Native corporations or village councils, local businesses, and tourism. Not only has this increased the cash economy, but it has meant that families do not need to be broken up as someone has to leave for seasonal employment out of the region. And, of course, most homes and businesses have the full complement of modern amenities, including electricity, running water, heat, and the Internet.

Despite all these improvements, being a permanent resident of the Wrangell-St. Elias area remains challenging and there are no guarantees of success. It still requires some of the same pioneering spirit of self-reliance and determination as those who first entered the high mountain passes and wide river valleys. In order for it to survive into the future, the next generation will have to be willing to disconnect from their screens and put in the hard work required of a life on the land. This means being willing to work hard, get dirty, be cold, not have much money, and be creative, entrepreneurial and multi-skilled. Of course, for those living in the more organized communities of Glennallen, Copper Center, Yakutat, Chitina, McCarthy, Slana, Chistochina, Mentasta, Northway or Tok, life more resembles small towns everywhere. You have next-door neighbors, and medical help is more easily obtained. And although there may not be a store or restaurant in your community, there is a store in a neighboring town not too far down the road, and there may be a restaurant open during the summer tourist season.

Reminiscent of the American frontier ideal this group of people share core values that revolve around self-reliance, incorporating nature into their lives, a sense of community, a system of give and take, an emphasis on close family ties, and utilizing items of value. In order to incorporate these beliefs into their lives each household rejects certain common amenities, perhaps considered luxuries, and embraces treasures of civilization they find valuable (Tyrrell 2002:90-91).

There is something special about life in the Copper, upper Tanana, and Chitina River valleys and at Yakutat. Perhaps it is the constant presence of the looming Wrangell and St. Elias Mountains reminding you of your place in the wilderness and how fragile and important that connection is. Certainly for many current and former residents, this place is part of their identity. The landscape and living outdoors and in time with the seasons have shaped who they are. They would not give it up for anything. And the hope is that others can see the value in this slower and, for many, deeper, way of life and will want to follow in their footsteps and do the same.

DATA GAPS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this ethnographic assessment and overview brings into sharper relief the history and culture of various occupational groups in and around Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, it also reflects limitations and gaps in the ethnographic record. These themes and questions can be further explored both within the extant record and in oral history interviews, life history projects, survey research, and community developed and produced profiles and ethnographies. Recommendations that follow are based on ideas developed by David Krupa when compiling the annotated bibliography along with discovery of data gaps while doing research for this report. Outlined below, in no particular order, are new avenues for productive research to better understand traditionally associated people and their connections with the park, as well as potential educational products.

- **Criminality and Justice:** This topic was briefly discussed in this report, but there is a lack of information and more research needs to be done to document the history of criminality and justice within the Wrangell-St. Elias area. M.J. Kirchhoff (2017) suggests that vigilantism and lynching were practiced during the Klondike Gold Rush, partially due to a lack of police presence out on the trails and at the remote mining camps. This begs the question as to what was happening in terms of crime, lawlessness, and enforcement in the Wrangell-St. Elias area at this same time, and subsequently, as non-Native in-migration increased. Discussion of this piece of what life was like out on the trail, at the mining claims, or in the towns is missing from this EO&A and much of the historical material used as resources. More research needs to be done to answer questions, such as: What level of crime was there during the peak of mining in WRST? What were the dominant types of crime that occurred? How did the small communities or groups of homesteaders or miners deal with crime and criminals? How was justice enforced? Was the federal system of US Commissioners as judges effective? Was there vigilantism and did individuals take it upon themselves to punish criminals? What types of punishments were doled out? How has criminality and law enforcement changed as the population has changed, increased, and moved around? How safe do residents feel today? Kirchhoff's article demonstrates that getting at the heart of this requires extensive research with historical newspapers. Such an effort was not possible for this EO&A given the timeframe and funding. A specific project targeting these questions of wilderness justice would add important depth to our understanding of what life has been like for people living in and around WRST in various time periods, and help fill in some missing pieces.
- **Intergenerational Transmission of Culture, Lifestyle, and Heritage:** Do children typically stay in the region, leave and return, or leave altogether as they reach adulthood? Is homeschooling more common among a particular group, and how does that influence their socialization identification with the wider Alaska and national identity? What do the heirs of established families do, and what are their trade-offs? How do they balance the unique upbringing they have through living in the bush or in small rural communities against the drawbacks of limited educational and professional opportunities?

- **Land Use Areas:** How do the areas used for subsistence activities compare between different groups of traditionally associated people – more recent arrivals compared with those with centuries of accumulated knowledge and connection to place?
- **Cultural Integration:** This topic was briefly discussed in this report, but there is a lack of information and deserves further exploration. How frequently do non-Natives integrate with the existing Native communities either by marriage, lifestyle, or residence? Non-Natives have historically and contemporarily married into or developed trapping partnerships with Native communities and individuals often gain their competency in subsistence activities by learning from Native elders. What draws non-Natives to live in a predominantly Native community and culture different from their own?
- **Cultural Diversity:** How have people from other cultures or countries been accepted into the region and mixed with the resident population, both historically and currently? This topic was briefly discussed in this report, but there is a lack of information. More research needs to be done to document the diverse ethnicities of those who came and worked in the Wrangell-St. Elias area, including African-Americans, and describe the lives they made for themselves. To tell the stories of these various non-Native groups from their own perspectives.
- **Religion:** What is the role and history of religion in the area? And how do the various religious missions and communities integrate or reconcile their religious convictions with the local communities and cultures? To what degree do religious functions unify or separate people?
- **Identity:** How do these traditionally associated people self-identify? Are they aware of and interested in carrying on their life way as an expression of a particular heritage? If so, what are the critical components of that heritage?
- **Governance:** How do the communities organize and govern themselves? How “invested” in various advisory, planning, political, and governance committees and organizations are people living in the area? Have the advisory bodies such as the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Advisory Committees, the Federal Subsistence Program’s Regional Advisory Councils (RACs), especially the Eastern Interior, Southcentral and Southeast RACs, and the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park Subsistence Resource Commission led people to more deeply engage and trust the process of including local input into public policy planning? Have these groups affected how people feel about agencies, conservation lands, regulations, and competition from non-local residents, non-residents, and neighbors?
- **Economy:** What new industries and opportunities have developed as a result of the park and its economic power as both a direct employer and as a tourist and visitor draw that brings money into the area? How have the changing regulatory and management regimes affected “traditional occupations”? Have requirements favored large, outside companies to supplant smaller mom and pop organizations that might have had exclusive clientele in years past?
- **Employment:** How are new occupations and emphases emerging through time, and are other occupations fading? There may be less mining and trapping today, but now there are businesses supporting recreational activities (mountaineering, photography trips, and adventure travel) that were not there in the past. Are these changes indexed by population turnover and/or by evolving in place and finding new opportunities?

- **Local Ecological Knowledge:** Documentation of local environmental and ecological knowledge within Native communities in and around the park has been done to a limited extent, but as Haynes and Simeone recommended, more should be done (Haynes and Simeone 2007:142). While William Simeone included observations from non-Natives on the use of large mammals in the Copper River Basin (2006), based on the interviews and research for this report, long-term non-Native residents should be included in more of this type of work. Many of them have years of experience traveling the land and developing their own observations and understanding of change. Some of these residents have kept daily journals of environmental observations which if given wider distribution could prove invaluable to researchers and resource managers.
- **The Role of Women:** A striking number of women figure prominently historically and in the present story of the Wrangell-St. Elias area, from pioneering mountaineer Dora Keen, to miners, lodge owners, guides, pilots, teachers, business owners, health aides, and shopkeepers. In many, but not all of these cases, these women lived, worked, and thrived in historically male-dominated professions and places, and their influence contributed greatly to the character of their communities and the region. While this EO&A has addressed parts of this story, and there is photographic representation of it in *At Work in the Wrangells: A Photographic History, 1895-1966* (Ringsmuth 2016), there is more to be said about the lives and contributions of these women and how they coped with their circumstances. Production of a report or interpretive educational material on this could help highlight its importance.
- **The Role of Horses:** Horses and wrangling represent a significant, substantially documented, and unique and ongoing tradition in the Wrangell-St. Elias area that has continued into the present-day. Horse travel during the summer and fall continues today for many outfitters, guides, and homesteaders. Some contemporary outfitters advertise horse-based hunts and guided backcountry trips as a more authentic experience than aircraft-based guided trips, and as more in keeping with fair chase traditions of hunting. While this EO&A has addressed parts of this story, production of a report or interpretive educational material on this could help highlight its importance. In addition, it would be useful include a discussion about how the use of horses in WRST, both historically and today, compares to other Alaskan national parks and preserves.
- **Administrative History of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve:** The early administrative history of the park has been well documented by Geoff Bleakley in *Contested Ground: An Administrative History of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, Alaska, 1978-2001* (Bleakley 2002), but much has happened in terms of regulation, management, and relationship with communities since 2001 and this history needs to be brought up to the present day. More oral history interviews with traditionally associated people about relationships between the NPS and communities would provide first-hand experiences that NPS officials could use to help understand the impacts of their regulations and management style and how this may have changed since 2001. By better understanding the social and cultural milieu in which they are working and by collaborating more with local residents, the NPS managers may be able to reduce conflicts with the public about the regulations and improve community and individual relations.
- **Modern Mining:** Much of the story of mining in the Wrangell-St. Elias area in the existing literature ends with closure of the Nabesna Mine in the 1940s. There is a lack of information

about what it is like for current miners on patented and unpatented mining claims, some of which are within park boundaries. Oral history interviews with these folks could enlighten the public and park managers about what this lifestyle entails, the hardships and frustrations they face, the joys they experience, and why they have chosen to continue despite battling government rules, regulations, and restrictions. No matter the time period when mining occurred, the stories from everyday lives of miners are missing – what it was like working day in and day out digging in the dirt and sluicing in cold water or spending day after day inside a dark tunnel; how they handled being alone and far from family; how much money they earned and what they spent it on; what motivated them to keep searching for the elusive treasure or to endure harsh working conditions; if they had their family with them, what family life was like; what they did for recreation; how they learned the tasks required for mining; how they got their supplies and equipment; what they did for medical care; and what friendships were like between miners.

- **Community History:** McCarthy is a unique community within the park with a long history of occupation. Kirchhoff's book *Historic McCarthy: The Town That Copper Built* (Kirchhoff 1993) clearly documents its foundation and early history, but the story ends in 1992, and includes little about what has happened there since park establishment. A comprehensive and cohesive ethnohistory of McCarthy from 1980 to the present, including stories of the characters that have resided there and made the community what it is would be a useful contribution to understanding the lives of the traditionally associated people who have made this place their home. In addition, one key story is missing from Kirchhoff's book, that of Kate Kennedy, who was an important woman in the town's history and whose story should be more fully told that has been possible in this report, and made available to a broader public audience.
- **Yakutat Associations with Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve:** When thinking about Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve most people think about the road accessible region of the Copper, Chitina, and Upper Tanana River valleys. Few realize the southern coastal section is part of the park or that Tlingit people of Yakutat have a history of using that region. More public information about the Tlingit and the southern portion of the park in visitor centers and interpretive material could help alleviate this. *The Yakutat Tlingit Ethnographic Overview and Assessment* (Deur et al. 2015) provides good coverage of the Tlingit culture and history in the Yakutat area, there are some oral history interviews with residents of Yakutat in the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve Project Jukebox (www.jukebox.uaf.edu/wrst), and *Fish and Wildlife Use in Yakutat Alaska: Contemporary Patterns and Changes* (Mills and Firman 1986) and *Harvest and Use of Wild Resources in Yakutat, Alaska, 2015* (Sill et al. 2017) demonstrate Yakutat's reliance on locally harvested resources. However, what is missing from the existing literature is more about the connections between the people of Yakutat and the park itself, non-Native sport hunting and guides using the park area before it was protected, and what life is like in Yakutat for its current residents. It would be a useful contribution to have stories from non-Natives living in the community, discussion about relations between non-Natives and Natives, and how people access and use the resources of the park.
- **Historical Documentation Projects:** A number of oral history or community-based documentation projects could be conducted to jog memories, provide community access to materials moldering on the shelves, and connect land and resource managers to local communities. For example:

1) Historical photographs, papers, and maps in archival and private collections put a face on the cultural landscape of the Wrangell-St. Elias area and should be better identified and catalogued. Some collections are identified in the annotated bibliography, such as the Alaska Road Commission Photograph Collection or the Stephen Capps Papers, but by working with local residents in a photo documentation project it may be possible to achieve more accurate identifications and descriptions of this material than currently exists. In addition, there is archival material not listed in the annotated bibliography that could be incorporated into a more thorough cataloging, such as the William C. Douglas Photograph Collection recently accessioned into Rasmuson Library at UAF. Personal, community or tribal photo collections that might be hidden away and not publically known about could contain critical historical material that should be better preserved, and locating them could prove helpful for future researchers looking for photographic images of the region. At minimum, a current list of existing photographs and collections related to the WRST region, both in archives and in private collections, should be compiled to assist staff members and researchers trying to locate images. In addition, NPS might consider helping preserve family collections through digitization and/or donation to an established archive or the NPS.

2) There is a rich “archive” of local knowledge in the minds of traditionally associated people regarding homesteading, trapping, hunting and fishing, sewing and crafts production, guiding, gardening, building, and general on-the-fly ingenuity that is needed for daily life in a tough and often lean environment. An agency funded, school-connected “how-to” documentation project where older residents mentor and teach the youth how to do traditional activities and the students write articles or produce audio/video segments with step-by-step instructions could produce something akin to the *Foxfire* book series that documented local knowledge from Appalachia in the 1970s.³ *Foxfire* remains among the most popular legacies of the early “back to the land” and environmental movements of the 1970s.

3) Publish a Wrangell-St. Elias area-dedicated “Sourdough Sagas” collection that shares the remarkable stories of the pioneering non-Natives, culture, and history of the area. New outreach might bring in new material and interviewees to share their unique stories with a broader audience. Distribution locally and statewide could highlight the special character of the people and the place, as well as demonstrate the mutual benefit of a national park being an occupied wilderness.

4) Interview residents about their connection to place and the environment. Do they support the “preservationist” orientation of the National Park Service’s management mission? Do they want resources protected so they can continue their hunting and trapping lifestyle? Do they have a sense of living among the ghosts of bigger and better times and base their current practices on the need to honor that older way of life? How are adapting to new conditions in a changing environment?

Endnotes

¹ Current ORV rules for Wrangell-St. Elias National Park are available at <https://www.nps.gov/wrst/learn/news/orv.htm> (accessed January 10, 2018).

² For more about the current mixed cash-subsistence economy and the continued importance of fish and wildlife harvests in rural Alaska, see “Regional Patterns of Fish and Wildlife Harvests in Contemporary Alaska” by James A. Fall (*Arctic*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (March 2016), pp. 47-64); Fall 2016; and BurnSilver et al. 2016.

³ For an example of the Foxfire method and format, see the first book in the twelve volume series: *The Foxfire Book: Hog Dressing, Log Cabin Building, Mountain Crafts and Foods, Planting by the Signs, Snake Lore, Hunting Tales, Faith Healing, Moonshining, and Other Affairs of Plain Living*, edited by Eliot Wigginton (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1972).

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