



Arts in the Parks Events Continue to Inspire



Sixteen artists, along with 100 of their family and friends, participated in last month's Alaska State Parks' Arts in the Parks weekend at Byers Lake Campground in Denali State Park. Painters came from communities as far away as Fairbanks and Homer, but predominately from Anchorage, Eagle River, Palmer, and Wasilla to capture on canvas the beauty of the area.

Born in Russia, Vladimir Zhikhartsev is a Plein Air watercolor painter who lives in Fairbanks and has participated in several AIP events. "Traveling in order to paint on location is critical for my art," says Zhikhartsev. "It helps me build a lasting relationship with the place and its people, feel its life energy, and capture its essence."

Begun three years ago, AIP is a weekend event held in a state park with artists, many of which bring family and friends, camping and painting Friday through Sunday. Other activities this past month at Byers Lake included hiking around and canoeing on the lake. Activities during the weekend included a children's abstract painting class, an alcohol inks workshop, a wild mushroom walk, and a potluck dinner Saturday evening.

"It is always inspirational to participate in the Arts in the Parks weekend," says Ben Ellis, Alaska State Park director. "I am not an artist, but watching these talented painters capture the natural beauty of some of our beautiful state park scenes is awesome. Regardless of whether the painters are professionals or novices, the enthusiasm they bring to the weekend makes it very special."

The AIP program will expand next summer to add an Artist-in-Residence component following the Alaska State Legislature appropriation of start-up funds last session. Located outside of Juneau at the Earnest Gruening State Historical Park, artists will be able to submit an application to spend one to two weeks beginning next summer at the historic cabin practicing their discipline. Details of the program and the application process will be announced later this fall on Alaska State Parks' homepage, as well as on its Facebook page and through media releases.

For more information on Arts in the Parks or the Artists-in-Residence opportunities, contact Dave Griffin, special assistant to the director, at (907)269-8696 or via email at david.griffin@alaska.gov.





The Haida Descendant Dancers, an intergenerational traditional Alaska Native dance group, performs inside the clan house at Totem Bight SHP.

Lighting the Trail for the Last Dance

The Haida Descendant Dancers are an intergenerational traditional Alaska Native dance group from the Ketchikan area. For the past 14 years, they have performed and provided cultural programs at Totem Bight State Historical Park once a month throughout the summer. Every month they share a new song or dance they have learned. They discuss the role the song played in their culture and explain the family genealogy with the regalia they wear. The excellence of their dance presentations consistently attracts close to 100 visitors for each performance.

The last dance is always on a September evening, the sun setting before the dance is over. The trail through the forest back to the parking lot is always a little dark. This year, park volunteers made 25 luminaries to light the trail. It will become a new tradition for the last dance of the season, adding to the dreamlike feel of this wonderful cultural experience.



A dancer represents the Kushtaka, a half-man-half-land otter, of North Pacific Native folklore.



Floyd's frog clan design on bentwood box drum



Luminaries were placed along the trail after the Haida Descendant Dancers performance, which concluded after sunset.

Hurray for Nice New Toilets!

This month, project engineer Roxanne Risse has been hard at work installing park toilets throughout the state. Demand for these toilets is so high that people are requesting to use them even before they are finished, regardless of portable toilets being available nearby. The toilet for the Kenai Area at Eagle Rock has been installed and is nearing completion. The Northern Area, Fairbanks North Star Borough, and Chugach Area toilets are installed and operational, with even the final touches complete. These toilets look amazing against the backdrop of fall colors—yes, that's right, they're pretty. Nice toilets are a big deal in Alaska State Parks and these certainly are nice.



New toilet at Whitefish Campground in Lower Chatanika River SRA

Northern News

- State Parks teamed up with Forestry to finish trail clearing projects in Chena River State Recreation Area this fall. Thanks to the Recreational Trail Program grant, we have been able to tackle some much needed clearing on the Granite Tors and Chena Dome trails.
- Jon Underwood with Happy Trails Inc. will start working on Mastodon Trail later this month. The trail has finally dried out enough to work on. We have our fingers crossed, hoping that the weather holds and we can push ahead toward completing the trail all the way to the Nugget Creek public-use cabin.
- Congratulations to Ranger Melissa Smith for successfully completing her field training program. Also, a big thank you to the field training officers who made it possible. Kurt Hensel, Jacques Kosto, Ian Thomas, Jack Ransom, and Matt Wedeking devoted many hours to training Melissa.



Trail work continues on the Stiles Creek Extension in Chena River SRA. Eight hundred pounds of annual rye grass is being seeded along the new trail corridor to help stabilize the trail shoulders and prevent erosion.



Northern Area maintenance staff installed a new entrance sign at the Upper Chena Dome Trailhead in Chena River SRA, replacing the last wooden entrance sign in the Northern Area state parks. This marked the end of an era of using wooden signs. Out with the old and in with the new!



Nine trail gates have been installed at major trailheads in Chena River SRA. These gates, which were funded through the Recreational Trail Program grant, will help park staff manage trail closures during public emergencies and seasonal trail restrictions.



Boy Scout Eric Cater of Troop 78 (sixth from left) assembled a huge crew of volunteers to build a pedestrian bridge on the nature trail at Twin Bears Campground in Chena River SRA. The bridge was his Eagle Scout community service project.



Northern area staff moved this cabin last spring from the maintenance compound at mile 33 of the Chena Hot Springs Road to the Granite Tors. The cabin will do double duty, serving as the campground host residence in summer and as a public-use cabin in the winter.

Fur Trade Era Rendezvous at Settlers Cove SRS

“Sea otters have the thickest fur of any mammal, and it is considered one of the most valuable types of fur in the world. How thick is it? There is as much as 1,000,000 hairs per square inch,” says Christy Ruby, a Southeast Alaska Native who can legally hunt sea otters and sell finished products.

At this Labor Day weekend event, Christy wowed excited participants with the softness of the sea otter pelts, a characteristic that brought about extensive hunting of this charismatic sea mammal between 1741 and 1911, during the maritime fur trade era. Since then, protections have been put in place and, though sea otters are considered an endangered species, their populations have come a long way toward recovery.

The sea otter pelt display and discussion was just one of the activities in which families could participate. Dean and Dena Eichelberger, volunteer camp hosts at Settlers Cove, brought Fur Trade Rendezvous experience with them from Minnesota.

Totem Bight State Historical Park volunteers, Mary Ann and Paul Hoefer, came out for the fun and helped coordinate the activities. Other activities included tomahawk throwing, making fire with flint and steel, games without electronics, salmon egg and natural dye painting, afternoon tea, and Dutch oven cooking.

The intermittent, glorious sunshine with occasional bursts of pouring rain made the program challenging, but donated canopy tents kept participants mostly dry. The weather didn't prevent families from attending the Fur Trade Era Rendezvous. Groups of curious participants showed up for the park program in waves. All together, a little over 100 guests of all ages threw the tomahawk in this successful event.



Christy Ruby shows her sea otter pelts used for demonstrations during her interpretive program.



Park host Dean Eichelberger teaches participants how to start a fire with flint and steel.



Kids learn about creating paint with fish eggs and natural dyes.



Kids and adults took turns at throwing a tomahawk.

Conference and Nike Veterans Reunion Commemorates 25th Anniversary of the End of the Cold War

The Alaska Historical Commission was a major sponsor of the Alaska Cold War Conference and National Nike Veterans Reunion held in Anchorage earlier this month. Sergei Khrushchev, son of former Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, gave the opening address. He spoke to a standing-room-only crowd at the University of Alaska Anchorage's Wendy Williamson Auditorium about the late 1950s through early 1960s and the leadership displayed by his father, by President Dwight Eisenhower, and then by President John F. Kennedy.

Khrushchev, an engineer and scientist, accompanied his father to several summits where the leaders met. He said none of the three leaders intended to go to war, but they had to appear to be strong leaders to the international community and to their own citizens. He said the three were forced to build up their country's defenses by their military leaders and the public's perceptions.

The next day, current and former commanders of the U.S. Army and National Guard in Alaska spoke about military activities in Alaska during their tenures. Bob Wallace, a retired CIA agent who frequently traveled to Alaska for work, gave the luncheon address. He talked about secret expeditions to learn about airfields in Siberia and the camps the Russian military established on large ice flows in the Arctic Ocean.

At Kincaid Park, the conference attendees and a number of Anchorage residents learned about the former Nike Site Point. Two interpretive panels and a plaque were unveiled that tell the story of the post and recognize the work of the soldiers stationed there to protect the site—particularly the missiles—after the devastating 1964 earthquake. The panels were produced by Alaska State Parks' Interpretation and Education program and funded by the Office of History and Archaeology.

The next day, the conference moved to Arctic Valley, where another interpretive sign about Nike missile sites in Alaska was unveiled and attendees toured Nike Site Summit. Several men who had been stationed there jumped in as tour guides.

More than 60 Nike veterans came from all corners of the United States for the events, and explained the operations of the missile launch sites and radars. They reminisced and shared their memories of getting up the road to Nike Site Summit and installing and maintaining the star that the military still lights as a gift to the city of Anchorage. Staff with the Oral History Program of the University of Alaska Fairbanks interviewed some of the vets and will have the material available for researchers and the public later this year.

Many volunteers, corporations, foundations, and nonprofit groups helped the Alaska Historical Commission make the conference happen. Chief among the groups are the Friends of Nike Site Summit, the Alaska Association for Historic Preservation, Alaska Veterans Museum, and Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. The idea for the conference came from Lt. Governor Mead Treadwell, who chairs the Alaska Historical Commission. Before Treadwell leaves office this year he is compiling a newspaper-style publication featuring Cold War history and emphasizing Alaska's role in the conflict, enriched with accounts by participants and images of Cold War sites in Alaska.



Sergei Khrushchev, son of Nikita Khrushchev, gives the opening address at the Alaska Cold War Conference and National Nike Veterans Reunion held in Anchorage this month.



Bob Wallace, retired CIA agent, speaks at the Cold War Conference Luncheon held at the Captain Cook Hotel



Bob Wallace, retired CIA agent, and Sergei Khrushchev, son of Nikita Khrushchev, discuss the Cold War at the Cold War Conference events held in Kincaid Park, site of a former Nike missile site, in Anchorage.



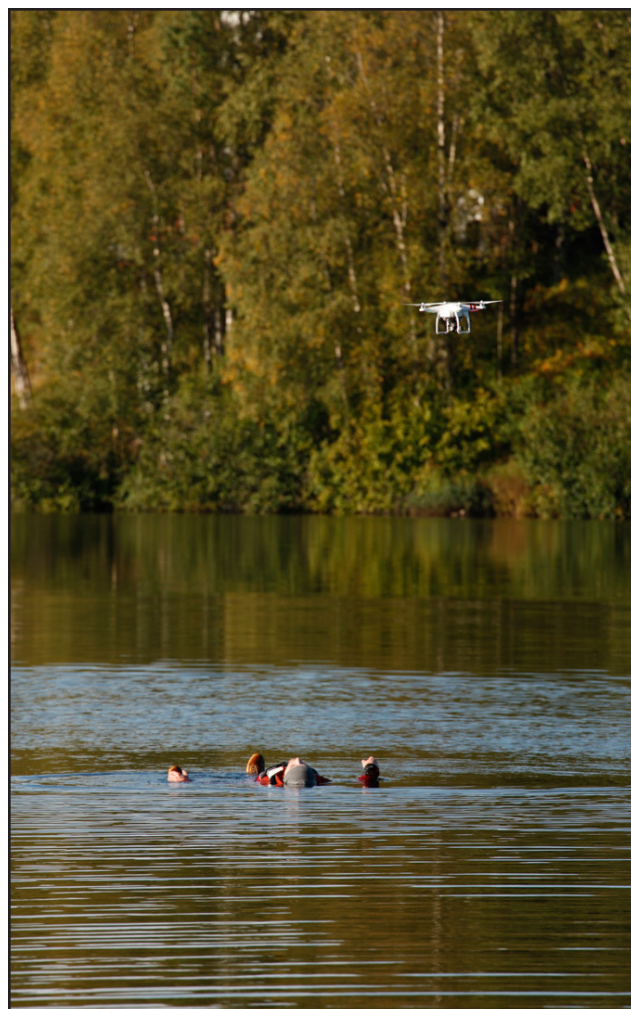
Office of Boating Safety Prepares for 2015 Pledge to Live Campaign

The Office of Boating Safety is busy preparing the program's social marketing efforts for next year, primarily through the Pledge to Live campaign. The campaign is being updated for 2015 with new TV and radio spots, currently under development. The goal is to increase awareness of and appreciation for the primary risks associated with boating on Alaska's cold water, and lead boaters to adopt the behavioral changes necessary to reduce or mitigate those risks.

Above: The rescue team comprised of volunteers from the Mat-Su Dive Rescue Team and the Anchorage Fire Department approaches the victim during a simulation.



Office of Boating Safety staff and the contracted film crew observe the filming from the shore of Jewel Lake.



An actor simulating a boating accident scenario is photographed and filmed by a drone outfitted with a GoPro camera.



Poems in Place

The Poems in Place project, in its second year, recently brought two more poetry signs into state parks. The poem selected for Independence Mine State Historical Park was written by former Alaska Poet Laureate Tom Sexton and was installed the last weekend of August; the poem selected for Lake Aleknagik State Recreation Site was written by poet Tim Troll and installed the first weekend of September. Alaska State Parks employee Meg Anderson designed the signs and project coordinator Wendy Erd organized both dedications, which also included writing workshops.

Other key people who made these two sign installations successful are: Mat-Su park employees Paul DiMaggio, Nick Allen, Amy O'Connor, Dan Belanger, and Dan Amyot, and Wood-Tikchik State Park rangers Bill Berkahn and Ali Eskelin. Alaska State Parks will continue working with the Alaska Center for the Book to bring two more poems into state parks in 2015, one at Fort Abercrombie State Historical Park and one at Caines Head State Recreation Area.

The Poems in Place project is supported by the Rasmuson Foundation, Alaska State Council on the Arts, the Alaska Humanities Forum, the Usibelli Foundation, the Alaska Poetry League, Alaska Center for the Book, and numerous generous individuals.



Former Poet Laureate Tom Sexton poses with the panel bearing his poem at Independence Mine SHP

Independence Mine: *"Independence Mine, August"*

On the last Saturday of August, former Alaska Poet Laureate Tom Sexton dedicated his poem, "Independence Mine, August" beneath a rare bluebird sky to an audience of 28 poets, park visitors, and staff.

Tom held a poetry workshop for a few hours prior to the dedication in the historic library of Independence Mine's Bunkhouse No.1. Participants enjoyed a first-hand experience of what life was like when the mine camp was operational and, as mentioned in the poem, they stopped to pick blueberries on their way home to their families when the festivities ended.

Dept. Director Claire LeClair, Chief Ranger Dan Amyot, Park Ranger Amy O'Connor, Park Specialist Dan Belanger, and Hatcher Pass area ACCs Erin Murray, Samantha Hartman, and Bernard Federspiel were all present to enjoy this fun event.



Continued on page 7

Continued from page 6



Native leader Bobby Andrew and a child take a look at the newly installed poem

Lake Aleknagik: "The Wisdom of the Old Ones"

A panel bearing the poem "The Wisdom of the Old Ones," written by poet Tim Troll as part of the Poems in Place project, was installed and dedicated at Lake Aleknagik SRS early this month. Fifteen community members attended the dedication.

Two writing workshops were held as part of the poem dedication festivities. Tim Troll and Molly Chythlook led the Yupik Place Names Workshop at the Aleknagik Schoolhouse Inn and shared their knowledge of Yupik place names, which 12 people attended. Wendy Erd led a creative writing exercise.

Alaska State Parks Welcomes New Faces



Ryan Thomas

Ryan Thomas recently joined the staff of the Director's Office as a Natural Resource Specialist I. He will be assisting the division with park-use permitting and special projects. Originally from Fairbanks, he attended the University of Colorado where he obtained a bachelor's degree in geology and later a law degree focused on natural resource and water law. Most recently, he worked at the Institute of the Environment at the University of Arizona. Ryan is thrilled to be back in his home state and excited to be a part of the team at Alaska State Parks. When not at work, you'll find Ryan exploring the mountains around Anchorage with his wife, Whitney, and their two dogs.



Tiffany Vassar

Tiffany Vassar started her new position with the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation this month. She started working for the State of Alaska in December 2012 as an Office Assistant II with Oil and Gas. After a few short months, she quickly was promoted to an Admin Assistant II. Prior to her state service, Tiffany worked in a number of service industries; she brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to her new job. We are excited to welcome her to our team and look forward to working with her.

