

THE INSIDE TRAIL



Voice of the Glacier Park Foundation □ Fall 2018 □ Volume XXXIII, No. 3

HOWE RIDGE

*For the third time in four years
fire forces an evacuation in Glacier*



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No “Quiet Week in Lake Wobegon”

Ah, for a quiet week in Lake Wobegon! It surely wasn't a quiet summer in Glacier National Park, literally or figuratively speaking. The summer's turbulent events are set out extensively in this issue.

Most prominent of those events, of course, was the Howe Ridge Fire. For the third time in four years, a major forest fire shut down much of Going-to-the-Sun Road and forced the evacuation of a lodge. The evacuation this year occurred urgently and had to be made close to nightfall. The National Park Service, the lodge concessioner Xanterra, and local fire departments all worked admirably in this crisis.

A less urgent but more complex crisis is the increasing traffic in the Park. The number of visitors in 2017 and 2018 (before the fire) was unprecedented. Parking problems, pedestrian problems on roadways, and crowding on trails was often acute. There are no easy answers to these developments. The Park Service commendably has managed them day-to-day without overreacting. Hard and creative thinking will be called for to address them in the long run.

The Park Service is handling double the visitation it had about a decade ago with essentially the same resources. Glacier's friends need to

step up to help. We commend the work of the Glacier National Park Conservancy in raising private funds to supplement the Park's budget. The Conservancy admirably has raised large sums to help rebuild of Sperry Chalet, in addition to its normal fundraising. We urge those who can to support the Conservancy and its Sperry Action Fund.

On the subject of quiet, the Foundation's Board of Directors recently voted to join the Quiet!Glacier Coalition. This effort seeks to eliminate commercial helicopter overflights in Glacier. Twenty years ago, we supported the goal of eliminating overflights set out in Glacier's General Management Plan. That goal has been thwarted by a policy deadlock between two federal agencies (discussed in an article in this issue). The noise of the overflights is annoying and distracting to Park visitors, and we hope they can be curtailed.

Happy trails! We all cherish Glacier and its robust community of friends and supporters.

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The Glacier Park Foundation was formed by Glacier Park employees and visitors who have a deep love for this special place. The Foundation is committed both to the importance of wilderness preservation and to the importance of places like Glacier as classrooms where people can experience wilderness in intense meaningful ways, learning not only a love for the land, but also a respect that nurtures the skills necessary to preserve that land. The Foundation has a special interest in Glacier Park's history, traditions and visitor facilities.

The Inside Trail takes its name from the famous old trail which connected Glacier Park Lodge with the vanished chalets at Two Medicine, Cut Bank, and St. Mary. The name thus emphasizes the publication's focus on the lore and history of Glacier National Park. We invite submission of historical, scientific, or anecdotal articles, commentary, poetry, or artwork for publication in future issues.

HOWE RIDGE FIRE

“The fire had ignited two days earlier, touched off by a lightning storm.”

By John Hagen (Many Glacier 1970-1980)



“It was blazing on the west side of Lake McDonald, largely on ground burned fifteen years earlier in the Roberts Fire.”

(Photo courtesy of Eric Matt.)

Early on the evening of August 12, Marc Ducharme was playing in a recreational hockey league in Whitefish, Montana. Marc is general manager of Xanterra’s Glacier National Park Lodges, the concessioner for Glacier Park. A few hours earlier, he had met with Park Service officers at West Glacier to discuss the Howe Ridge Fire.

The fire had ignited one day earlier, touched off by a lightning storm. It was blazing on the west side of Lake McDonald, largely on ground that was burned fifteen years earlier in the Robert Fire. It had been attacked with Canadian “super scoopers” – fixed-wing aircraft that skimmed the surface of the lake, sucked up water and dropped it on the fire. Helicopters carrying buckets joined the suppression effort.

Those measures did not stop the fire from spreading toward the north end of the lake. It was burning the snags (many of them over 100 feet tall) of

cedar trees killed by the Robert Fire, burning underbrush and burning thick duff on the ground. Those involved in the meeting were concerned, but thought a crisis unlikely that night. Ordinarily, cooler nighttime temperatures retard the growth of a fire. They agreed to reconvene in the morning.

Marc felt no hesitancy in going to play in the hockey game, but he brought his cell phone and left it at rink side. When the first period ended, he checked it. He found thirteen messages, one of which was a text from Jean Tabbert of the Park Service Concessions Office: “mandatory evacuation in place for Lake McDonald Lodge.”

Marc rushed to his vehicle unshowered, and drove quickly to Xanterra’s red bus garage in Columbia Falls. His twelve-person emergency team was mustering there to pursue a

well-rehearsed plan to evacuate Lake McDonald lodge.

Xanterra has hard-won expertise in evacuating lodges in Glacier. Three times in the past four years, a forest fire has compelled it to do so.

In 2015, the Reynolds Creek Fire exploded and forced a quick evacuation of Rising Sun Motor Inn. In 2017, Xanterra decided to evacuate Lake McDonald Lodge when smoke from the Sprague Fire imperiled people’s health. This summer, the lodge had to be evacuated again, but far more rapidly and complicated by nightfall.

The Destruction of Kelly’s Camp

The crisis arose very rapidly on the early evening of August 12. A great column of smoke, fueled by the burning snags, was rising vertically from the fire. Strong west winds knocked the column down, unleashing a furious ember storm.

The fire made a terrific run along the shores of Lake McDonald, giving rise to scenes of high drama. Kelly's Camp, a spot rich in Glacier's history, was almost all destroyed.

Kelly's Camp is one of the privately-owned inholdings on Lake McDonald. The inholdings were acquired before Glacier Park was created in 1910. Kelly's Camp was established by Frank Kelly, who homesteaded in the 1890s, ran boats on Lake McDonald, and rented guest cabins in the early years of the Park. The camp is well known for the depredations of the Trout Lake Bear, which stalked people there before killing Michelle Koons on the Night of the Grizzlies in 1967.

Kelly's Camp included the "Big House," owned by the National Park Service, and many smaller cabins with private owners. The occupants were ordered to evacuate and got out just ahead of the fire. All but one of the cabins were destroyed.

Observers across the lake watched propane tanks explode at Kelly's Camp. Further down the shore, they could see the Lake McDonald Ranger Station's boat house burning and flames projecting horizontally toward the ranger station itself.

Embers pelted on the ranger station's roof. The building was saved by two intrepid Park Service veterans, Jeremy Harker (Glacier's Assistant Fire Officer) and Kyle Johnson (a recently retired Wilderness Manager, who volunteered to help with the crisis). The two men tossed a sprinkler from the station's grounds up onto the roof, and it successfully quenched the fire.

A Terrifying Ride

Meanwhile, two campers had a nightmarish and nearly-fatal adven-

ture. Charles and Justin Bilton, a father and son, were camped on the north end of Lake McDonald when the fire made its run. They drove away through the flaming forest, recording the scene through their windshield on video.

The terrifying sequence, shown on national television, can be seen on YouTube. Hellish scenes unfold as the son exclaims, "Dad, the car is heating up; we're going to explode ... God help us!" Appallingly, the Biltons found the road to safety blocked by a fallen tree. Surrounded by fire, they desperately backed up into the inferno of Kelly's Camp. They parked beside the one cabin there which ultimately did not burn, and scrambled to the shore of Lake McDonald.

Jess Kimball, a Glacier Park Boat Company captain, happened to be close by. She and a companion were in a rental boat, scuba diving on a day off. They saw the Biltons waving frantically, and came to their rescue. She recalls:

"We were pretty close to shore, about 100 yards. The fire had jumped to the camp and was starting to burn a cabin on the northern end of the shore. The trees around the camp were going up in seconds, it was very loud and the wind was incredibly strong, making it hard to drive the boat. Not to mention all the burning debris being blown everywhere. A burning branch struck a bald eagle, that dove into the lake and never came back up.

"It was just light enough to see Justin and his dad clearly. We loaded them up, got their gear and headed south to the foot of the lake. As we motored back it was tough to see Kelly's Camp, the first place I fell in love with in Glacier, burn down."

The lake's proximity saved the Biltons. The heat at Kelly's Camp was fantastic. It melted the wheels and the exhaust manifold of their car, and it melted the rain gutters of the sole surviving cabin by which they parked it. After the fire, visitors found pools of melted aluminum on the ground

The Wheeler Cabin

Among the structures north of Lake McDonald is the historic Wheeler Cabin. The cabin belonged to Burton K. Wheeler, who served in the U.S. Senate for Montana from 1923 to 1947. Wheeler used the cabin to broker an agreement for intertribal cooperation among Blackfeet, Flathead, and Kootenai-Salish leaders.

The Wheeler Cabin lay in the path of the fire as it made its eastward run. The cabin and other nearby structures were defended by fire departments from communities outside the Park. They included the Flathead County Office of Emergency Services and the Columbia Falls, Evergreen, Creston, Martin City, Blankenship, Bad Rock, and South Kalispell Fire Departments.

These agencies all sent structural firefighting teams to the Park's defense when the emergency arose. The Park Service expressed profound gratitude to them. Glacier has little structural firefighting equipment of its own, since it has to concentrate its limited resources on wilderness fires.

The Wheeler Cabin crisis arose in a manner uncannily like the crisis the previous summer at Sperry Chalets. Firefighters saw smoke beneath the eaves, obviously from inside the building. They promptly smashed windows and found fire smoldering overhead at the roofbeam. At Sperry, the fire was unquenchable, but the Wheeler Cabin was saved

with the quick use of handheld extinguishers.

The cabin is salvageable, and the Glacier National Park Conservancy hopes to raise private money to restore it. Senator Wheeler's historic library fortunately had been removed before the fire and stored in the Park Service archives.

Evacuation at Lake McDonald

The crisis along the lake evolved rapidly. An order to evacuate Kelly's Camp was issued about 7:10 PM. Around 7:40, a second order was issued to evacuate Lake McDonald Lodge, inholdings on the northeast side of the lake, and the Avalanche and Sprague Creek campgrounds.

The order was urgent. Some diners in the Lake McDonald dining room resisted leaving their meals and had to be reasoned with 'emphatically'. Employees were told to pack nothing, but to get directly aboard shuttles. Red buses were mobilized to transport employees and guests who had no cars.

Scores of vehicles soon were moving southward along Going-to-the-Sun Road. To the west and north, orange flames dramatically soaring into the inky night and were reflected in the lake. Cars pulled into turnouts to observe the scene, and had to be rousted out by rangers.

Most of the evacuating vehicles turned west on Highway 2. There, by a perverse coincidence, stripes were being painted on the road. A miles-long convoy of vehicles crept along behind the striping equipment.

The Refugee Camp

Meanwhile, Marc Ducharme's 12-person emergency team methodically was carrying out their evacuation plan. Red buses had been dispatched within minutes to pick

On August 17, Xanterra decided that Lake McDonald Lodge could not be reopened in 2018. Employees from the lodge who wanted work were transferred to Yellowstone, Swiftcurrent or Glacier Park Lodge. Some employees chose to undertake adventures elsewhere, and some went home.

up the Lake McDonald staff. Meanwhile, the team set up camp for the evacuees at Xanterra's bus garage.

Four team members took the Xanterra warehouse truck to Wal Mart in Kalispell and bought its whole stock of essential supplies. Wal Mart employees were agog at the peremptory purchase of about 200 sleeping bags, 100 tents, all available cots, air beds and air mattresses, and the store's entire stock of bottled water. Two runs with the warehouse truck were necessary to transport it all.

The camp was set up on five acres of vacant land beside the bus garage. Tents were set up for all the evacuees. Most of the American employees knew the drill, since most had worked at Lake McDonald in 2017 and had been evacuated then. International members of the staff (from Japan, the Dominican Republic, Taiwan and Thailand, among other places) mostly expressed a preference to sleep in tents in the garage instead of outdoors.

While the camp was being erected, Xanterra's food-and-beverage team went to Domino's and bought about 50 pizzas. The evacuees were amply fed when they checked in. Further meals were served buffet-style from banquet tables, with the evacuees organized to help with preparation and cleanup.

Next morning, more facilities were added. Xanterra erected a large

event tent, in which all the employees could gather. Portable toilets were set up. Showers were improvised in large tents, divided into four by privacy curtains, with water brought in through PVC pipes.

Marc Ducharme recalls that "the weather was perfect – not for fighting fires, but for camping," and that the encampment "had the feeling of a festival, with all the tents and the music." Some of the employees had instruments (the first thing that a musician might grab in a fire!). Xanterra provided lots of activities, including rafting trips on the Flathead River, trips to the water slides in Columbia Falls, and shuttles to the stores in Kalispell.

On August 17, Xanterra decided that Lake McDonald Lodge could not be reopened in 2018. Employees from the lodge who wanted work were transferred to various locations (about 70 went to Yellowstone, and about a dozen went to Swiftcurrent or to Glacier Park Lodge). Some employees chose to undertake adventures elsewhere, and some went home.

Ongoing Battle with the Fire

For several weeks, the Howe Ridge Fire expanded northeastward and also expanded westward, driven by winds from various quarters. Firefighters labored to contain it. A "Type I" interagency fire team marshaled the Canadian aircraft, American helicopters, "hotshot" fire crews,

Park Service and Forest Service personnel, and local fire departments. The cooperative nature of the effort was impressive to all involved.

On its eastward front, the fire menaced not only Lake McDonald Lodge and other structures, but also some of Glacier's loveliest woodland – the 600-year-old cedar-and-hemlock forest that overlooks Going-to-the-Sun Road. Sprinkler systems were set out along McDonald Creek and in the Avalanche area, but these measures might have been overwhelmed by the prodigious force of the fire.

Scott Burch of the Glacier Park Boat Company transported fire crews up the lake and had unparalleled views of the fire. He describes fantastic scenes. Gigantic dead trees from the Robert Fire, hollowed out and burning, were like big chimneys. Scott recalls that at night they “looked like the stacks at a refinery, with flame coming out.”

When high winds took those flames, Scott says that “the crowning was mind-boggling.” At one point, 45-knot winds took the fire up Mt. Vaught. The wind and the slope generated “thousand-foot flames,” which burned the peak to its summit.

Firefighters slept at the Sprague Creek campground. Across the lake, they could hear reports like gunshots booming across the lake – the sound of massive trees collapsing. This was sobering, since firefighters much more frequently are killed by falling trees than by flames.

Trees collapsed when groundfire destroyed their roots. Giant snags killed by the Reynolds Fire, whose roots already were degraded, were especially prone to collapse. Some-

times the charred tops of these snags would collapse into the hollowed trunks. This could cause the trunks to explode and send big shards of timber flying out. Working among the burned trees was dangerous for firefighters and sawyers.

In mid-September, rains and cooler temperatures tamped down the fire. Park visitors at first were allowed to travel through the McDonald Valley by shuttle bus, but not by private vehicle, because of the priority of fire traffic). By late September, the situation had stabilized and normal access was restored.

Aftermath

The Park Service and Xanterra had to deal with complex logistics after the fire. Employees and guests left a great deal of gear behind at Lake McDonald Lodge. Their belongings had to be retrieved, inventoried and shipped in subsequent weeks.

Some French hikers had camped at Arrow Lake on the night that the fire exploded, and left their car at the Lake McDonald trailhead. They

had to hike out in the opposite direction, to the Inside North Fork Road. They had left their passports in the car. It was weeks before rangers could reach the charred vehicle. Its aluminum wheels had melted in rivulets that ran down the hill.

The fire burned within a hundred yards of McDonald Creek on the east. It burned to the Inside North Fork Road in the area of McGee Meadow on the west. It consumed about 12,500 acres of forest and cost well over eight million dollars to suppress.

A concession employee relates a wry anecdote. After the evacuation, the Camas Road remained open west of Lake McDonald. She and some friends took an excursion there, and found the road beclouded with smoke. They drove through an area which was burned fifteen years before in the Robert Fire. The smoke momentarily parted, revealing an interpretive display about the ecology of forest fire. It was headed, “THANK YOU, WILDFIRE!”



(September 9, 2018 looking northeast from Apgar Mountain Webcam.)

INSIDE NEWS of Glacier National Park

Visitation

Visitation in Glacier reached startling levels in 2017. More than three million people entered the park, a million in July alone (a monthly benchmark unprecedented in any western National Park – not Yellowstone, not Grand Canyon, not Yosemite!) Roads, parking lots and trails were overwhelmed.

2018 brought slightly smaller but comparable visitation figures. More than 900,000 people came to Glacier in July. Visitation was reduced after August 12, when the Howe Ridge Fire forced evacuation of the Lake McDonald Valley. (The Sprague Fire forced a similar evacuation in 2017, but later in the summer. Lake McDonald Lodge was evacuated last year on August 29.

Traffic problems were acute again in 2018. At Logan Pass, the parking lot often was filled by 8:00 AM. Since many vehicles were parked by hikers, relatively few spots tended to open up for travelers making brief stops at the pass.

In the Swiftcurrent Valley, the parking lots at Many Glacier Hotel, at Swiftcurrent Motor Inn, and at the picnic area were jammed. Scores of vehicles would park on both sides of the road, and the remaining driving space was often crowded with pedestrians. Rangers eventually set hundreds of orange pylons, roped together, on the shoulders of the road to maintain order.

On many days, the traffic problems in the Swiftcurrent Valley forced temporary closures of the road until parking spaces became available. A veteran ranger recalled “a few days of real

mayhem when the west-side tourists came over” after the evacuation.

Long-time rangers also remarked on the startling numbers of hikers on the trails – “solid streams of people” going to and from Iceberg Lake and Grinnell Glacier. They also noted

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One ranger remembered leading a hike to Iceberg Lake and encountering a grizzly with cubs on the trail. About a hundred people had to stop and wait for the bears to move along. Some tourists promptly began to eat lunch and fling orange peels into the bushes! When rebuked, they sheepishly retrieved the peels. The episode epitomized many visitors’ need for the most basic sorts of instruction.

The Boundary Fire

While the Howe Ridge Fire threatened the McDonald Valley, another large fire broke out many miles to the north. The Boundary Fire ignited from unknown causes on August 23 on the Canadian border, west of Waterton Lake.

The National Park Service and Parks Canada, with allied agencies, coordinated to fight the fire. Canadian air-

craft took the lead, while the Americans provided more firefighters. The agencies issued joint press releases. (A Park Service information officer, having watched the Canadians labor mightily, observed, “I’m thankful that we don’t have to put ours out in both English and French!”)

The Boundary Fire menaced the Waterton Valley for several weeks, tenuously hemmed in by fire crews. Rain and cooler weather finally quieted it down in mid-September. The fire consumed nearly 3,000 acres in the area of Boundary Creek, and cost about a million dollars to suppress.

News of the GPI Lodges

As in recent summers, the “GPI” lodges (Glacier Park Lodge, St. Mary Lodge, Prince of Wales, and the West Glacier properties) played weekly soccer games on the big lawn at Glacier Park Lodge. Employees still use the “GPI” title in conversation – short for “Glacier Park, Inc.” – although the company now officially has changed its name to The Glacier Collection by Pursuit.

Glacier Park Lodge and Saint Mary Lodge, at the eastern gateways of Glacier Park, were far from the Howe Ridge Fire but felt its effects. The prevailing west wind brought plenty of smoke, and hundreds of west-side evacuees sought meals and lodging on Glacier’s east side. A manager re-

marked that the weeks of smoke and uncertainty were stressful, but that being busy helped to keep the staff's morale reasonably high.

Employees at all the GPI properties were invited to enter a photography contest in September. Photos were submitted in five categories (People, Landscapes, Wildlife, Wildflowers, and Water). Votes were cast by employees on Facebook and also by the guests at Glacier Park Lodge, where the entries were posted in the lobby. Some striking entries included the lights of the Prince of Wales Hotel reflected in Waterton Lake at nightfall, a red fox sitting by a flag on a green at the Glacier Park Lodge golf course, and a haloed sun burning like a searchlight through the smoke of the Howe Ridge Fire.

Swiftcurrent

Here's a quick story from Swiftcurrent Motor Inn. A visitor arrived and found the front porch crowded with people eating off dinner plates. "What's going on?" she asked. "Someone let off bear spray in the dining room, and they had to shut it down!" was the reply.

Renovations at Many Glacier

The renovated lobby and downstairs area at Many Glacier Hotel continued to win praise a year after their completion. Observers are virtually unanimous in complimenting the Park Service on the graciousness, attractiveness and historical quality of the restorations. The concessioner Xanterra also gets high marks for the quality and restraint of its operation.

Everyone is struck by the expansiveness of the lobby, now that the gift shop has been removed. The uncovering of the south windows that lay behind the gift shop now admits much more light and provides a broad

view of the valley. (You can look down the shore to where Stephen Mather famously blew up the Many Glacier sawmill in 1925, and imagine machinery cartwheeling skyward, to the ire of Louis Hill.)

The double-helix staircase connecting the lobby's main floor to the St. Moritz Room downstairs is beautifully crafted. (The original staircase, the lodge's best-known feature, was torn out in 1957 to make way for the expanded gift shop. It was replicated with great care in the 2016-17 renovation. The replicators masterfully fashioned the stairs and the railings in elegant spirals.)

The gift shop has been moved downstairs. Many people expected to find the whole St. Moritz Room crowded with T-shirts and postcards. Instead, the St. Moritz is uncluttered and graciously carpeted, with the west windows framing unobstructed views of the lake. The gift shop is understated, recessed in the north wall (where the Grill and then the '60s and '70s snack bar used to be). The Heidi's snack shop and coffee bar is recessed in the east wall, around the big fireplace.

Xanterra graciously has furnished the lobby with furniture of dark wood and brown leather. Lamps and light fixtures are shaped to resemble the Japanese lanterns that adorned the lobby when it first opened in 1915. Some pleasing elements of the 1950a restoration have been preserved: the Swiss cross on the doorways and the colorful Swiss canton shields (blue-and-white Zurich and Lucerne, the black bull's head of Uri, red Schwyz and others) on the second-floor balcony.

Red Bus Renovation

Glacier Park's historic red bus fleet soon will be given renovations. The thirty-three vehicles likely are the

oldest operational fleet of buses in the world. They were built by the White Motor Company between 1936 and 1939. They were restored by the Ford Motor Company with 6 million dollars of donated work from 2000 to 2002, after serious breakdowns.

The Glacier Park concession contract requires the concessioner to put 2½ percent of its revenues into a Red Bus rehabilitation fund. This fund (established in 2013) now is very substantial. Xanterra and the Park Service are planning the details of the renovation work.

The engines of the Reds will be replaced, as they have been several times in past decades. The proposed replacement will involve hybrid engines that run partly on electricity and partly on fossil fuel. The buses' batteries will charge and store electric power on downhill runs, which of course are abundant in Glacier.

The buses will be remounted on new chassis, as they were in the Ford restoration. The size of the tires will be increased from the present 16" to 18". (The Ford restoration reduced the tire size from the original 19" – a noticeable change. The proposed enlargement will enhance the Reds' historic look.)

A recent inspection found rust in the buses' historic bodies, under their paint. For that reason, the paint will be stripped, the rust will be removed, and the bodies will be refinished. The new paint faithfully will replicate the historic "mountain ash" hue from which the Reds derive their name.

Six buses will be renovated during this off-season. Thereafter, the rest of the fleet will be restored as cash in the fund allows.

The Park Service is considering an expansion of the fleet to help deal

with increased visitation to Glacier. (New buses would not replace the historic buses, but would supplement them.) A major question is whether new buses should be modeled on the Reds, or whether they should have a new look in order to keep the historic buses distinctive.

Rebuilding Sperry Chalets

As detailed in this issue, a remarkable rebuilding effort was carried out this summer at Sperry Chalets. Sperry's main building (the "dormitory" or sleeping quarters) burned in the Sprague Fire in 2017. Extraordinary work by the National Park Service and the Glacier National Park Conservancy has enabled restoration of the building on an expedited basis.

The dormitory's stone walls survived the fire. The Conservancy (which raises private philanthropic funds to support the Park) established a Sperry Action Fund. Donations in the first weeks after the fire enabled the Park Service to build an elaborate truss-work of wooden beams to support the stone walls during the winter.

The Park Service held open houses and a scoping process which showed that the public overwhelmingly favored rebuilding the chalet. An Environmental Impact Statement was generated very promptly, and it found no impediment to rebuilding. Last May, the Park Service released a plan to rebuild the chalet in two phases, in the summers of 2018 and 2019.

The 2018 work (Phase One) included installing a new foundation and first floor, installing interior framing (with features to withstand seismic activity) and installing a temporary roof. Bids were taken, and a contract was awarded to Dick Anderson Construction of Helena.

The bids for Phase One were lower than expected. The total cost of both

phases is likely to be 8 to 9 million dollars, rather than the 12 million dollars first projected. Doug Mitchell, the Conservancy's executive director, observed that Montana contractors believe in the project, and haven't taken advantage. This surprised some cynics who've been jaded by cost overruns on government projects. A ranger praised the work ethic of the builders, saying "I never saw any crew work like they work."

The Conservancy's Commitment

The Conservancy made an impressive commitment to support the Sperry project. It agreed to raise 2 million dollars for the Sperry Action Fund, in addition to the 2 million dollars it annually seeks to raise for Glacier Park.

The Conservancy's 2018 goals

involve some 55 projects, in addition to the Sperry Action Fund. The projects are categorized under Trails, Wildlife, Training Future Leaders and Stewards, Habitat and Infrastructure Restoration, Creating a Safe and Enjoyable Park Experience for Visitors, and Sustainability.

A Conservancy cover letter to a booklet listing these projects points out that "the Park is again breaking visitation records which force the park superintendent and his staff to allocate more resources towards

basic services and operations and reduces their ability to support maintenance, educational or other cultural programming investments and activities." The Conservancy seeks to meet these needs through philanthropy.

Doug Mitchell reports that "so far we're on pace to raise the money for Sperry, and it hasn't diminished our regular funding." The annual Backpacker's Ball, held near Glacier in August as a Conservancy fundraiser, was a success.

Another Conservancy fundraiser will be held on Nov. 8 at the historic Louis Hill House at 260 Summit Avenue in St. Paul. (Louis Hill, the president of the Great Northern Railway, was responsible for building Sperry and other lodges in Glacier in the 1910s.) The Hill House event begins at 5:30, and will feature remarks by Jeff Mow, the Superintendent of Glacier Park, by Nan Anderson, the lead architect on the Sperry project, and by other speakers. Tickets may be purchased at \$50 per person at www.glacier.org/stpaul.

Donations to the Conservancy can be made online at www.glacier.org, or by mail to P.O. Box 2749, Columbia Falls, MT 59912. Donations can be designated either to the general budget or to the Sperry Action Fund.

Another Conservancy fundraiser will be held on Nov. 8 at the historic Louis Hill House at 260 Summit Avenue in St. Paul. The Hill House event begins at 5:30, featuring remarks by Jeff Mow, Superintendent of Glacier Park, by Nan Anderson, the lead architect on the Sperry project. Tickets may be purchased at \$50 per person at www.glacier.org/stpaul.

Glacier's Historic Boats *Face an Uncertain Future*



(Photo courtesy of Scott and Barbara Burch.)

The Glacier Park Boat Company operates under a 10-year concession contract which will expire on December 21, 2019. The Park Service soon will issue a prospectus for a new boat concession contract. The future of Glacier's historic fleet of vessels therefore is uncertain.

*By John Hagen
(Many Glacier 1970-80)*

During the Howe Ridge Fire, the launch *DeSmet* was an integral part of the firefighting effort on the northern shores of Lake McDonald. The launch made dozens of trips with firefighters, sawyers and other personnel, shuttling them from camps and staging areas to the fire and back again. It was able to move them more quickly than would have been possible by Park roads, which sometimes were blocked or endangered by the fire. At times the launch also carried professional observers (including

firefighters from South Africa who entertained the crew with singing and dancing).

These exploits add a new chapter to the 88-year history of the *DeSmet* on the waters of Glacier National Park. Named for Father Pierre De Smet, a Jesuit priest who visited the Glacier area in 1845, the boat was launched in 1930. Its builder was the legendary J.W. ("Captain Billy") Swanson.

The *De Smet* has plied the big lake every summer (except when gas rationing effectively shut the Park down during World War Two). It

has rested in drydock in a boat-house on the shore of the lake every winter. Hundreds of thousands of visitors have boarded it to enjoy an interpretive tour.

Captain Billy constructed most of the other boats in Glacier's historic fleet. These include the *Sinopah* on Two Medicine Lake (built in 1926), the *Little Chief* on St. Mary Lake (also built in 1926), the *International* on Waterton Lake (built in 1927), and the *Morning Eagle* on Lake Josephine (built in 1945). He was granted boat concession rights in Glacier by the National Park Service in 1920. He ran boats until

1938, when he sold them to Art Burch, Sr. and a partner, who were businessmen in Kalispell.

The Burch family has operated the Glacier Park Boat Company for 80 years, through three generations. Scott and Barb Kaiser Burch are now the owners of the company. It owns the boats, but the Park Service acquired the company's possessory interest in fixed assets in Glacier (houses, docks, and boat houses) in 2009.

The Boat Company operates under a 10-year concession contract which will expire on December 21, 2019. The Park Service soon will issue a prospectus for a new boat concession contract. The future of

Glacier's historic fleet of vessels therefore is uncertain.

A large corporate enterprise might acquire the contract with a bid beyond the resources of the family company. A well-financed operator might choose to build an entirely new fleet, displacing the historic vessels.

The situation is very unusual, because the historic entities in question are privately owned. (By contrast, Glacier's historic red buses and lodges all are owned by the Park Service. When Xanterra outbid the incumbent concessioner, Glacier Park, Inc., in 2013, it simply acquired the right to manage those assets, which remained in Government hands.)

Important values are in tension. On the one hand, competitive bidding generally serves the public interest – especially since concession rights in a National Park are a functional monopoly. On the other hand, Glacier's boats have real historic value which is similar to that of the red bus fleet (and the boats are older than the buses). The Park will be diminished if they are displaced.

The *De Smet*, the *Sinopah*, and the *Little Chief* all are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. A nomination for the *Morning Eagle* is pending. The Winter issue of *The Inside Trail* will include an article on the history of Captain Billy and his boats.



(Photo courtesy of Scott and Barbara Burch.)

(Photos courtesy of Eric Matt and the National Park Service.)





A New Age of Music at Many Glacier Hotel



(Photo courtesy of Dalton Bowlin.)

“Bumpy roads, take me home – ”
This variation on John Denver’s “Country Roads” was sung at Hootenannies at Many Glacier Hotel in 2015, the hotel’s centennial year. (The “Bumpy Roads” theme, of course, was derived from the always-abominable state of the Many Glacier entrance road.) The 2015 Hootenannies were of exceptional quality, performed in the St. Moritz Room by a large, very talented and versatile group of musicians led by Emily Trapp Hackethorn.

For the next two years, the program faded. In 2016, the lobby and the St. Moritz were closed for renovation. The Hoots were held before small audiences in a corner of the Interlaken Lounge. In 2017, the Hoots were held in the Lucerne Room late in the evening. Attendance was minimal, performers felt discouraged, and the program seemed in danger of fading away.

This summer the Hootenannies took a strong step forward. Marc Ducharme of Xanterra gave permission for lobby performances at 6:30 PM. This venue restored the program’s popularity. David Cooper, the assistant Front Office Manager, gave the Hoots energetic leadership. He got strong support from Mary Notess, a performer in 2015 who now supervises Xanterra’s front offices.

Dalton Bowlin, Alex Hampton, and Sophia Welch were regular performers, and Dalton composed original music. Maxx Bates, a four-year veteran, once again expertly managed the sound system.

“Bumpy Roads,” “Hail to Thee, O Many Glacier,” and other old favorites were combined with new music familiar to Millennials. International employees from Japan, Jamaica and Ecuador performed (an Ecuadorean singer was remembered for enlivening a Hoot in “a full-on Mariachi outfit, bright red and yellow!”).

Alumni from seasons long ago (Carol Repulski Dahle, Jacquie Hjelmseth Fennell, Milt Crotts, and Dan, Michelle and Stephanie Maturen, among others) were welcomed as performers. Friends of Many Glacier look forward to more robust Hootenanny programs in the lobby in coming summers!

“Carry Me”

by Dalton Bowlin
*I hear the echoes of the wind
Breaking through the trees.
The subtle touch of cold
From the cool and gentle breeze.*

*So many changes just like the colors
Where the mountains meet the sky
And I’m afraid to go back home.*

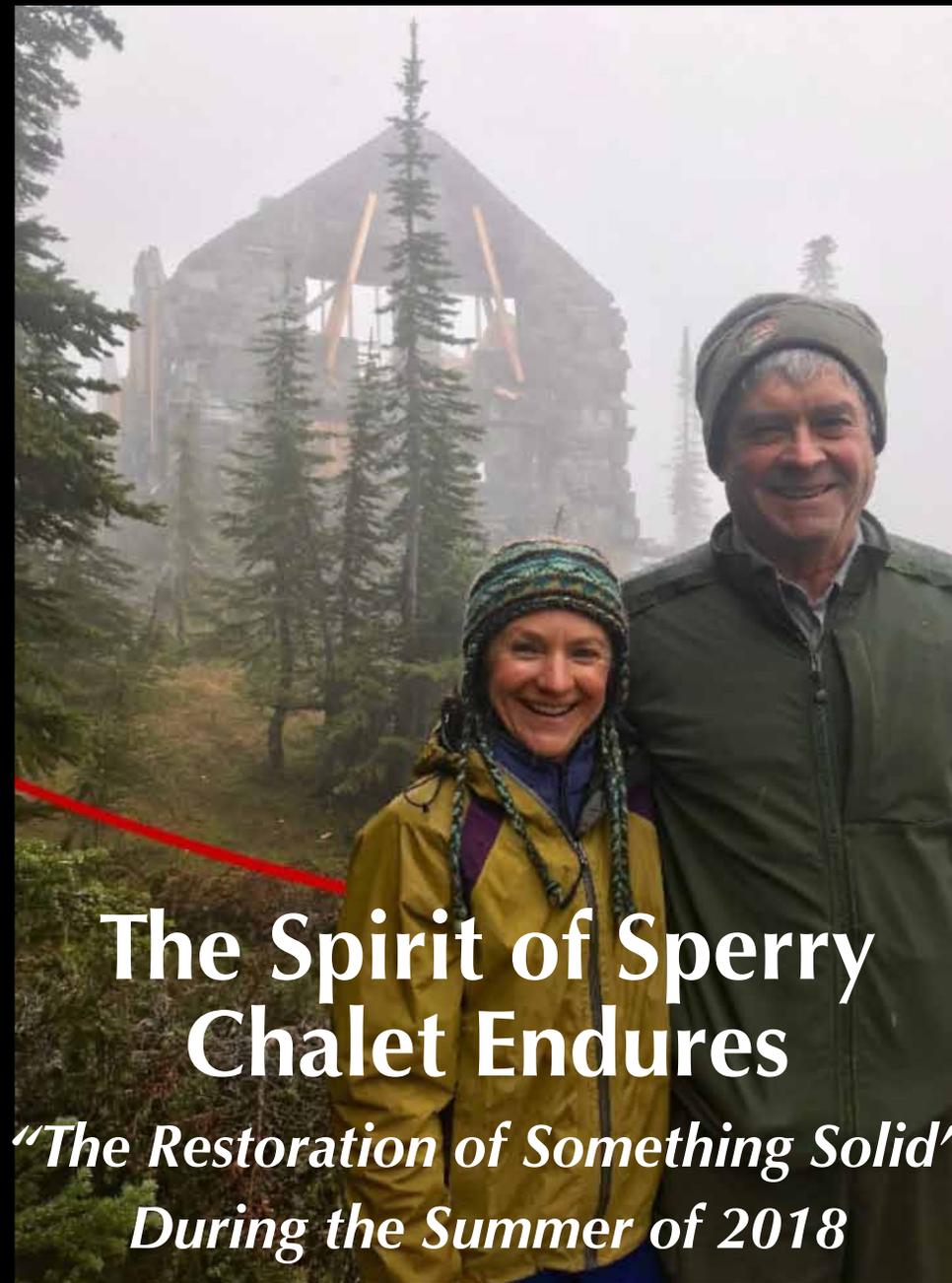
*I left my heart in the mountains
wherever the winds may blow
So carry me wherever these crystal rivers
flow on.
Familiar faces move away
To live out their own lives
But the memories will never fade away.*

*So many changes on the horizon
I know that God he will provide
And show me the way I need to go.*

*I left my heart in the mountains
wherever the winds may blow
So carry me wherever these crystal rivers
flow
As I wait for the day I go back home.*

*This landscape I used to think it was so
far
It’s even closer in my heart.
The life it gave no one can ever take
away from me.
Take me wherever all these crystal rivers
flow.*

*I left my heart in the mountains
wherever the winds may blow
So carry me wherever these crystal rivers
flow
As I wait for the day I go back home
No one can ever take this place I’ve come
to know.*



The Spirit of Sperry Chalet Endures

*“The Restoration of Something Solid”
During the Summer of 2018*

*By Karen Lennon
(Sperry and Granite Park Chalets,
1980-82, 2016-18)*

The roughhewn sanctuary in the backcountry of Glacier National Park known as Sperry Chalet is dear to many worldwide. More than a few have intimate personal stories of connection to this place. I am just one among them, but my personal story happens to have merged in time with the reconstruction of the dormitory that burned in the 2017 Sprague Fire. I was fortunate to have been hired again by Belton Chalets, Inc. to help manage the meal service operations during reconstruction

as a cook, baker and all-around hospitality specialist. I would say that anyone who has worked or will work for Belton Chalets, Inc., knows these duties well, as hospitality is certainly a central feature of a long legacy for the backcountry chalets in Glacier.

It was an interesting odyssey that brought me back to Sperry and Glacier. There is a strong mix of nostalgia and deep yearning for the places that hold meaning where one “comes of age”. Perhaps it was that strong mix that first prompted my husband and me to semi-retire from our professions after raising our two kids and take seasonal positions

The roughhewn sanctuary in the backcountry of Glacier National Park known as Sperry Chalet is dear to many worldwide. More than a few have intimate personal stories of connection to this place. I am just one among them.

Photos courtesy of Dan and Karen Lennon.)

that brought us from our home on Whidbey Island, Washington back to this northwest corner of Montana. It was, at any rate, a clear and definite calling to leave behind my career as a wildlife biologist, natural resource administrator and educator to again don an apron in the wilderness.

For my husband, Dan, it was a calling of another kind, as he left behind his work as an electrical engineer and took up a role as a water operator in backcountry utilities with the National Park Service (NPS). But our roots in Glacier are long and similar. We met in the summer of 1980 when I worked summers at both Sperry and Granite Park Chalets while I was an undergraduate at the University of Montana. I was so lucky to have had the indomitable influence of nature at its finest and the likes of Kay Luding at Sperry Chalet and Kathie Larson Aasheim at Granite Park as my guides and friends in those formative years.

It was Kay who encouraged me to hike 37 miles from Sperry at the crack of dawn one morning in 1982 through Floral Park to Logan Pass and then on to Granite Park and down the Loop trail and back up from Lake McDonald to Sperry in time to help serve dinner. She was so impressed with the feat that she had the *Hungry Horse News* write an article on it. In Kay's words, I was "twitterpated" with life in Glacier, and that zest for Glacier has never left me.

Dan was a wrangler in Glacier for many years in his early adulthood. He was one of several responsible for leading pack trains that brought supplies, propane and mail to the backcountry chalets. Our connection to each other as well as to the Park and the chalets is tied to those early summers steeped in wilderness and reliance on our own personal strengths at a place perfectly matched for our individual identities. And then, by some other mystical mix of fate or destiny, we remarkably met up again years later when I worked and studied upper subalpine bird communities at Mount Rainier National Park and when Dan had taken his first job as an electrical engineer in Seattle.

After marriage, professions and raising our family, we did not suffer from empty nest syndrome. Rather, Dan and I simplified our lives and freed up our summers to return to work together at Sperry in 2016 during the last full season before the Sprague Fire burned the Sperry dormitory. Since then, we have worked each summer in Glacier with Dan now stationed with NPS at Sperry Chalet. It was only natural that I too would return at this moment in history to serve the construction crews during Sperry's reconstruction. I work now alongside and for Kay Luding's grandsons as they continue to steward this amazing place. It has been quite a long and interesting odyssey indeed for so many connected to the chalets.

Since experiencing the incredible grief of losing Sperry Chalet last summer to the Sprague Fire, I jumped at the oppor-

tunity to play my small supporting role in bringing Sperry back. I worked on the Phase One Restoration from June through October 2018.

Sperry's Spirit and History

It strikes me now, having witnessed the process first-hand, that reconstruction is not a sad chapter to endure but rather very much true to Sperry's inherent spirit and early history. The tent camps of Dick Anderson Construction are laid out much the same as were the first tent camps from 1911 through 1913 (before

In some ways, Sperry is like a place frozen in time. Just as before, supplies to feed the camp are still carried in by long pack trains or brought in on foot and the stone kitchen and dining hall near the tent camp remains the heart of Sperry Chalet and the gathering spot for all.

and during the construction of the original dormitory that was completed in 1914).

What remains fundamentally the same from then to now is the kitchen and dining hall building that is the heart of Sperry Chalets. In some ways, Sperry is like a place frozen in time. Just as before, supplies to feed the camp are still carried in by long pack trains or brought in on foot and the stone kitchen and dining hall near the tent camp remains the heart of Sperry Chalet and the gathering spot for all.

In 1912, a small group of Italian stone masons was hired to build the first structure at Sperry: a 22' x 80' stone kitchen and dining hall near the tent camp that served as lodging for both visitors and construction workers. This past summer, I have often imagined the loggers and timber framers of yesterday gathered alongside those talented Italian stone masons to share a meal and the simple and sincere hospitality that is the hallmark of Sperry today.

I can imagine those long-ago laborers talking, joking and strategizing the day's

work just as Dick Anderson's crews did this summer with their timber framer, architect, engineer and masonry colleagues. I also imagine that each meal and snack was served then with the same spirit of hospitality that is the hallmark of Sperry today.

The Kitchen Crew

In the kitchen, we bakers and cooks are casually referred to as "The Cha-ladies," with sometimes a "Cha-laddie" or two in the mix depending on the hitch and crew rotation. The stone dining hall

and kitchen have long provided nourishment, warmth and community in the wilderness at Sperry. This summer of reconstruction was no exception.

Since the sleeping accommodations for the meal service crew had burned down, a curtain divided the dining room to hide four beds arranged in bunks for sleeping. This arrangement was not ideal, since each day began noisily with breakfast preparations at 4:45 a.m. and did not end until the last dish was washed after 8:00 p.m.

Since Louis Hill first opened Sperry Chalets, working there has required long and dedicated hours. By mid-summer, it begins to feel more like a life style than a job. The resulting shift in perspective, and the community bonds that grow from it, are likely responsible for the deep and close network among former chalet staffers.

Phase One reconstruction was done by two crews from Dick Anderson Construction, which rotated weekly. One crew, led by Rob Terrio, was from Helena, while the other, led by TJ Lashley, was from Great Falls. Thus, unlike in

normal seasons, the “guests” we served in the dining hall were with us throughout the summer. They had engaging and often hilarious personalities.

The crews became part of the Sperry family and the changed perspective that forms deep bonds among us all. We worked hard side by side. We shared both the sweet and the difficult aspects of life in the wilderness, as well as the triumphs and struggles inherent in a complex rebuilding process.

Challenging Logistics

A few things stand out to show the complexities of that process, from the limited but very constant view of the dining hall. From my perspective, the rebuilding of Sperry was much like watching something being built backwards. The building’s familiar stone outer structure still existed, but its internal supports did not. It was hard for everyone involved to comprehend how the renovation would be accomplished.

One surprising element was the poor condition of the stone walls. (This was noted right away, when the architects and structural engineers accessed the site after the long winter.) The tremendous heat of the fire caused more crumbling of the masonry than had been initially thought. The interior stones also had been altered by heat, so that there was a layer of flaking stone.

Fortunately, those original Italian stone-masons were extraordinary craftsmen. The rock infrastructure, while superficially damaged, was found to be generally intact and strong. The contemporary architects and engineers showed amazing professionalism, quickly adapting to the new complexities. In many weeks, however, a very skilled structural engineer had to work very hard on drafting new plans, in order to stay one step ahead of the construction crews.

The original plans for Phase One called for putting a temporary roof on the dormitory. (This is necessary to protect the indoor framing and floors from the

winter.) But installing a roof was made far more challenging by the crumbled masonry. Masonry repair had been scheduled for Phase Two (in 2019), not included in the Phase One bidding.

To support the roof, a temporary skeleton had to be built within the existing stone ruins. When the needed masonry work is completed next year, the skeleton will be removed. The process, again, has a backward appearance, but in fact is an creative response to a formidable problem.

One notable innovation since Louis Hill’s time is the use of the helicopter. It was as an integral part of Phase One reconstruction. The pilot, Mike Mamuzich, of Minuteman Aviation Inc., showed amazing talent and aviation artistry. Without him, it would have been impossible to position the heavy rafters for the roof without the benefit of cranes.

While the reconstructed timber framing will appear to be solid wood logs, each log beam and rafter is actually fortified with interior steel I-beams. They provide extra strength to increase the structural integrity of the dormitory for the many rough winters and years ahead. Helicopters played a key role in coordinating the placement of these reinforced logs and beams with the construction crews.

Helicopters also used regularly carried building materials and supplies from a staging area in Nyack, Montana, just outside the Park. More building materials, food, propane, and other supplies arrived weekly by pack train, when the construction crews would switch. Access and egress for horses, mules, and hikers was carefully coordinated to avoid conflict with helicopter operations.

Dick Anderson’s crews were amazing in their dedication and ability to meet all the challenging demands of the project. They fully embraced Sperry, and they cared for it conscientiously throughout the summer, with non-stereotypical construction crew manners.

The crews were well trained. They adhered not just to high standards of safety but also to wilderness ethics and principles of wildlife and vegetation protection. And this, when mountain goats were literally licking every new stick of lumber and every tool they could get near! It was hard work to keep the goats at bay while building the forms for the concrete foundation pour, a long and grueling process. In a summer full of difficult milestones, the push to get the concrete poured at the beginning and the push to get the rafters on the roof near the end stand out as the two longest, most time-sensitive and arduous projects of the summer.

Challenges in the Kitchen

For my own crew, the most arduous tasks involved planning and preparing meals in a primitive kitchen without electricity. We also had to coordinate weekly pack trains, give hospitality to hikers, maintain propane tanks, take weekly inventory and order the supplies. Sometimes there were emergencies to deal with, as hikers arrived with heat exhaustion, near-hypothermia, or injuries.

We had to adapt to an ever-changing number of diners, in addition to the scheduled construction crews. In a project as complex as this one, the roster of construction professionals, consultants and other visitors fluctuated greatly. We needed not just good communication but also last minute preparations and creative stretching of our menu items.

Another challenge we faced was to have enough diversity in meals, snacks, cookies, desserts and bread to keep our work interesting and to hold the interest of those who we were feeding. It was the longest season ever experienced by a Sperry crew. It required a fair bit of artistry to keep the meal service fun and delicious throughout.

For me, as one of two summer-long kitchen crew members, it also was difficult to keep up with the training needed by others. New crew members brought

vastly different skill sets. They rotated through the kitchen at short and long intervals throughout the summer.

There were other more comical challenges. These related to spending inordinate time confined with others, day and night, away from loved ones and the amenities of home. On one nasty-weathered day, two members of the Helena crew, known to be joined-at-the hip and good-natured, engaged in some uncharacteristic bickering. We Cha-ladies took it upon ourselves to set an intimate table for two that evening, complete with solar-battery simulated “candlelight,” so that they could work it out over dinner. This naturally drew much laughter and lightened the mood for everyone. The two crew members did indeed work it out in characteristic good humor.

The challenge that affected the entire project in August was the Howe Ridge Fire. It flared up from one of those brief and intense lightning storms unaccompanied by rain. It seemed to threaten the ability of the Phase One crews to meet the season’s goals. The smoke was heavy and dramatic and the mood was low. We all struggled to find ways to keep our spirits up.

Going-to-the-Sun Road was closed. It was a challenge to coordinate access and egress for supplies and crew rotations. Very poor work conditions persisted for a few weeks, but gradually the smoke subsided. It was often better at our elevation than down below in the McDonald Valley. From Lincoln Peak, you could follow the fire’s growth through late September, when its intensity lessened considerably.

Restoring Something Solid

The transformation of Sperry’s crumbling stone remains in June to the realized goal of new floors and framing under a protective roof in September has been nothing short of miraculous. I like to think of those Italian stonemasons of yesterday. Their intent to construct something lasting and the artistry they brought to it is worthy. I am a believer in this bit of magic: that strong and right intentions lead to enduring endeavors.

At Sperry, you are stripped down. All the trappings of technology and business fall away. Instead, it is the simple and abiding truths that matter: good company, wholesome food, reliance on each other and on our abilities to learn how to develop fellowship through our shared experience in a place on the edge. Wilderness can be a harsh place, but it is always a place sharply in focus.

The reconstruction of Sperry Chalet is more than a rebuilding of a beloved historical dormitory. It is honoring what is simple and abiding that rings true for all who have experienced fellowship in places like this. There are not many places like this anywhere. It seems to inspire the best in us – the wild and splendid parts inside of each of us that yearn to endure.

It is true that the backcountry chalet experience is not a wilderness purist’s ideal. Yet, there remains a special magic worth saving at great expense in the stone of Sperry Chalet – something that has an indelible human footprint. I like to think it was imbued there in the artistry and care of those original stonemasons from Italy who were tasked with Sperry’s

construction. The love of those craftsmen is in those stones, and it lives still in the care taken to restore this place.

I also like to think that in the kitchen at Sperry, the care and intent imbues even the food with a little of that magic. It seems to me that the spirit of Sperry has quite a bit to do with fellowship and sharing what each of us has to offer, however humble. The wilderness setting demands it and we learn to listen there. There are so few places where that type of awareness is happening.

During this summer of reconstruction, I am proud to report that (although we were imperfect) we were good to one another. There was laughter, camaraderie and some hard times as well. There were card tricks, songs and good-natured rough language not often heard in previous years in the dining hall.

Our “guests” this year were not as polished as those in a regular season. But they were loved. And, more than once, the helicopter landed and brought not only VIPs. It also brought ice cream ordered by our construction comrades as a surprise for the Cha-ladies because they cared about us. Some of us experienced Sperry for the first time and some of us, like me, returned again.

A roof was raised at Sperry this summer on a historic dormitory in the wilderness of Glacier National Park. The effort of doing it etched something as solid as stone in all those who have experienced it. Therein lies the magic of that rough-hewn place. Those Italian stonemasons of yesterday have passed a very special baton to us all. We are doing well to recognize our turn to carry it.

The reconstruction of Sperry Chalet is more than a rebuilding of a beloved historical dormitory. It is honoring what is simple and abiding that rings true for all who have experienced fellowship in places like this.



A Narrow Escape at Harrison Lake

By Mike Rihner
(Many Glacier, Glacier Park Lodge
1993-2018)

During my first three summers in the early 1990s working at Many Glacier Hotel as the Entertainment Director playing piano for the guests each evening, I began what would eventually become virtually a life-long quest to go backcountry camping overnight in as many of the designated campsites in Glacier Park as possible. From that very first night that I truly overcame my fear of bears by camping out at the head waters of magical Lake Elizabeth in the Belly River with 3 other Many Glacier employees, I was immediately hooked on the adventure of backcountry camping in Glacier Park. I started planning backcountry adventures as much as possible on my days off for the next several years.

Fast forward to the summer of 2003. By now I had now logged about 40 different backcountry camping sites in Glacier Park: Red Eagle Lake via Triple Divide Pass, Cosley Lake via Stoney Indian Pass, Hole-in-the-Wall via Brown Pass, and many other great pristine adventures. There were still many sites I had not been to, and one in particular was now calling me: Harrison Lake.

South of Lake McDonald Lake and just north of the Nyack region, the reclusive Harrison Lake is a large lake, but it gets very few backcountry visitors. Just to get to the trail head of Harrison Lake requires a challenging ford across the middle fork of the Flathead River, or else the much longer West Glacier Trail. Taking the ford seemed like the best adventure. I invited my long-time friend and fellow Glacier Park employee John Collins to hike with me, and we both became quite excited about the trip.

We went to the ranger station, got our permit, and prepared for our Harrison Lake adventure. We had heard there were some small fires on the west side of the park, but the ranger did not give us any particular warning about them when we received our permit, so we did not give them a second thought. It seemed there were all sorts of spotty fires in Glacier Park that summer. We woke up the next morning bright and early and began our Harrison Lake adventure.

Fording the middle fork of the Flathead River to get to the trailhead was a great adventure in itself and it could warrant an entire extended story of its own. But suffice it to say, we crossed the river, found the trailhead, and began our day-long adventure. John and I both like to fish, so we stopped every chance we could along the way to fish in the stream and along the shore of Harrison Lake. We stopped often and ventured off-trail to do climbing and exploring. We stopped again to fish. It was a spectacular day. We took as much time as possible and made in to Harrison Lake Campground by about 8 p.m. No one else was there. We had the whole campground to ourselves. Solitude at Harrison Lake! We set up our tents, relaxed for a while, then ate a late backcountry dinner.

After dinner, we walked out to the shore of the beautiful lake to do a little more twilight fishing before dark. We could see the last rays of sunlight glowing and lighting up the very top of beautiful Loneman Mountain across

the lake. It was a beautiful and serene Glacier backcountry moment. But it was at this moment when we both noticed a strong, odd smell. SMOKE.

John and I looked at each other with shock. All of a sudden, we both felt a huge wave of hot air blow over us. We turned around and looked up to see a huge flame of fire on the top of the mountain ridge directly behind us!

“Holy cow! The mountain is on fire!” we both exclaimed almost exactly together. We felt another rush of fire-heat blow down upon us, and then another. We stared up at the fire on top of the ridge in fear and in shock. “Are we going to get burned alive? What do we do now? Let’s get the hell out of here!”

We were both completely exhausted from our day-long adventure. It was about to get very dark in a matter of minutes. We had just set up our tents, and we were standing there with fishing poles in our hands as another wave of intense fire-heat blew down upon us. What were we going to do?

Of course, our first thought was to hike back out, but we were completely exhausted and it was now pitch dark. If we hustled, it would still take us 3 or 4 hours of hiking in total darkness to get completely out, as we would have to ford the stream again in the pitch black of night. But we knew we could not hustle. We were dead tired. The thought of possibly hiking into the fire at some point scared us even more. We were totally exhausted.

*Just as we made that final turn, we look up
and saw a giant orange glow directly in front
of us: FIRE!*

We chatted nervously about our next move. I noticed a pile of large downed logs along the shore of the lake. I said to John somewhat jokingly, yet somewhat seriously: "If this fire advances down the mountain, we can tie these logs together and make a raft; we can float out on the lake to avoid burning alive. If we fall in the lake, I think I'd rather die from hypothermia than from burning."

Did I mention that we were exhausted? We must have been a little delirious too, because we actually started to consider this raft idea as a real possibility for our survival. Another wave of fire-heat came down upon us. We stared up at the flames on top of the mountain behind us. We had decided we would not hike out. We were just too tired. We figured if we could somehow get just a little rest, even just an hour or two, we would then have enough energy to hike out, perhaps as early as 3 or 4a.m. It was a big dangerous gamble.

Next thing we knew, we were waking up to a cool clear mountain morning at Harrison Lake! The sky was clear and blue and there was no fire on top of the mountain! There was no smell of smoke! There were no waves of intense fire-heat blowing down upon us! Was all that a dream?

I cannot overstate the contrast from the night before compared to the next morning. Indeed, it was like the entire previous night was all a dream. On this morning, it was as beautiful a day as you could experience in the backcountry of Glacier Park. We considered that maybe that fire was not as big as we thought. Perhaps it was only a small isolated mountaintop burn that got put out by the intense moisture during the night. Or maybe it had even rained overnight on top of the mountain, just enough to douse the flames. Whatever, now there

were no flames. There was no smoke. Somehow we had survived the night!

John and I heaved a huge sigh of relief. The night before had been so scary. The experience of smelling the smoke, feeling the heat, seeing the fire, had been intense. Now it was all gone. Not a trace. We took out the fishing poles. We began to fish. We laughed about the previous night's experience. We couldn't believe what we saw and felt. What a contrast! We fished some more. It was a beautiful day at Harrison Lake. We did not pack up our tents and leave until about 2 p.m.

We took our time hiking out, again stopping to fish along the way as much as possible. We got closer to the end of the trail, and we were just about to make the final turn for the last quarter mile to get to the ford of the river. Just as we made that final turn, we look up and saw a giant orange glow directly in front of us: FIRE!

The fire was raging in a giant inferno directly in front of us and we had to keep **HIKING TOWARD** the flames to get out! We were so close to the trail junction leading to the ford,

nothing I have ever experienced. Running toward the fire went against every natural instinct in my body. We made it to the West Glacier inside trail and literally ran toward the ford. The fire raged directly behind us. We virtually jumped into the river and practically swam across it, as if by soaking ourselves we were insuring that we would not get burned alive. We crossed over to the other side of the Flathead, and looked back at the smoke and flames. We were soaked to the bone, but thankful that we had made it out alive.

When we reached our car that was parked at the pullout in the road, there was a large note on the windshield: "LAKE McDONALD and WEST GLACIER EVACUATED DUE TO FIRE. WEST GLACIER ENTRANCE CLOSED. LEAVE AREA IMMEDIATELY."

What is now called the Robert Fire had burned and spread all through the night, burning up much of the Lincoln Creek valley just north of Harrison Lake and thousands of acres around the Lake McDonald area. What was thought to be only a small insignificant

We had miraculously survived the night at the Harrison Lake campground directly in the shadow of this potentially deadly, now infamous Robert Fire.

maybe only 400 yards away, but the heat and blaze were extremely intense. There was no other way out. Bushwhacking seemed even more dangerous. We didn't know exactly how far the fire had spread. John and I were as nervous and scared as ever. We knew we had to hurry out as fast as possible, but we were now running **DIRECTLY TOWARD THE FLAMES!**

The five minutes or so it took for us to get to the junction seemed like five hours. The intense fire-heat was like

fire two days earlier when I got my camping permit had become a massive raging torrent of flames burning thousands of acres in Glacier National Park. We had miraculously survived the night at the Harrison Lake campground directly in the shadow of this potentially deadly, now infamous Robert Fire. Thank goodness our glacier backcountry guardian angels were watching over us! It was surely a backcountry adventure like no other.

Sperry Camp in the Early Days

By Tessie Bundick

(*Many Glacier 1972-73, 76-80*)

The Great Northern Railway was on a building spree during the early part of the 20th Century in Glacier National Park. Before they erected the great hotels, however, the railway people established several camps throughout this magnificent recreational paradise in Montana to attract paying guests. One of these spots was called Sperry Camp, located 4 miles from the beautiful glacier of the same name. The exact determinants of the 4 acre tract of high elevation land were: Section 21, Township 33, north, Range 17, west, Montana Meridian.

Glacier became a national park in 1910, and by 1911, Great Northern sponsored camps had sprung up, including the Sperry acreage. There were sleeping tents with wooden floors, cots and mattresses and a tented dining hall and kitchen. Some of the supplies on hand included heaters, wash tubs, tobacco cutters, clothes pins and clothes lines. Conditions were rather primitive, but the scenery was spectacular and the campsite was very popular with guests arriving mostly on horseback. Meals were regularly served.

In 1911, a Missouri Company (with offices in Minneapolis), Peterson and Fell, was hired by the Great Northern to run the Sperry enterprise. Peterson and Fell supplied the cooks, waiters, etc., while the Great Northern furnished the equipment. Tourists were charged 75 cents for each meal and each night's lodging. Coupons could be used for the convenience of the visitors. Communications from this very remote area were done by telegraph and the operations extended into October.

By 1912, work began on a 22 ft. by 80 ft. random rubble stone and wood dining room/kitchen/storage area. By 1913, the building was completed. In 1913, a 32 ft. by 90 ft. dormitory was begun, also made of wood and stone. In August

of 1913, an inventory of materials that Engineer K.J. Zinck needed at the Sperry construction site included: 4 kegs of shingles, 2 hot air stoves, paint for the porch floor, and stain for the windows. Other items listed were lumber nails, 2 sacks of quick lime for the toilets, 1200 3 inch water pipe connectors, 2 double bit-axed axes, 1 pound of borax, 300 pounds of blacksmith's coal, 1 pair of flat jaw tongs for forge work, cook house window fastenings and one roll of netting.

The lumber needed to erect the Sperry buildings was brought to the Hotel Glacier (at Lake McDonald) and had to be hauled up to the site at considerable effort, as this camp was very high up in the Rocky Mountains. Other edifices on the 4 acre lot included toilets, a water tank and a meat house.

A pipe was run to a small lake for water supplies. The president of the Great Northern, Mr. Louis W. Hill, took a keen interest in these camps. It was his opinion that a laundry or baths were not needed at Sperry – it was just too difficult to build them.

The Great Northern had to get permits to build in this national park from the Assistant Secretary of the Interior. The permits had to be drawn and signed by the Park Superintendent, executed by the company, approved by the Department of the Interior and then returned to the Superintendent. Fees due had to be paid in advance. Mr. Hill thought that the \$100 per site, per season, fee was too much considering that the Railway did not charge very much and also considering all the improvements that the Great Northern had made in the park.

There was some thought given to establishing a profit sharing plan that had been put into effect by the Desmond Company in Yosemite, which involved a sharing of profits by the Department of Parks and the concessionaire. It was decided that this was probably not a good idea because after the second year, the government could change from profit

sharing and charge 4% of the Glacier Park Hotel Company's (the Great Northern's) gross income, which would not be acceptable.

The permits allowed the Glacier Park Hotel Company to graze animals on the sites. Part of the deal was that the Railway Company had to keep the buildings it erected "sightly in appearance and the grounds and structures kept in a sanitary condition." The Secretary of the Interior reserved the right to establish prices, schedules and rates of charges made by the Great Northern. The licensee could not "injure any part or portion of the park."

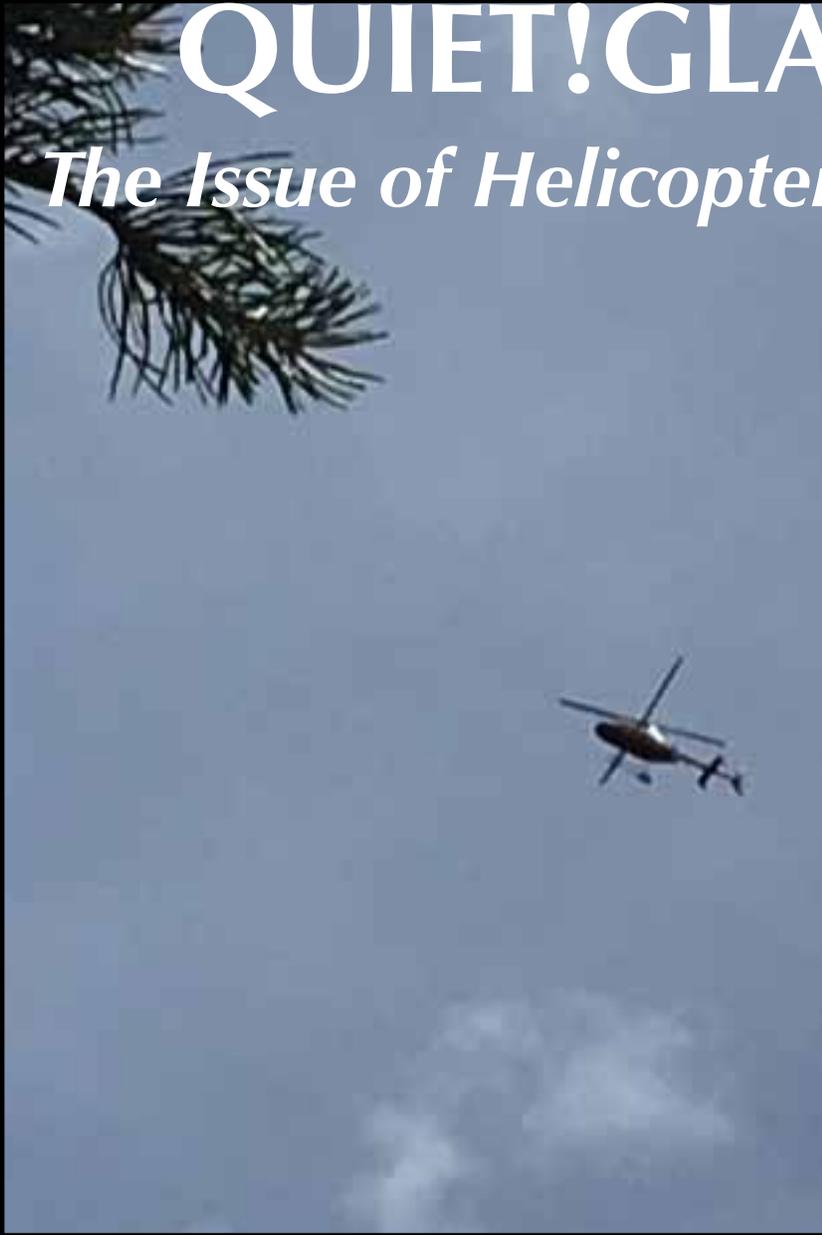
The camps were removed from civilization, but they tried to cater to the needs of the travelling public. By 1915, the company was selling items at Sperry such as soft drinks, cigars, tobacco, post cards, picture booklets, candies, chewing gum, magazines, newspapers, fishing tackle, toilet articles, curios, various items of food and clothing and so on.

Conditions were difficult at these far flung locations, but serene and very scenic. Supplies had to be hauled up the steep Sperry trail by pack horses and mules. It is a testament to the determination of Louis W. Hill and the Great Northern Railway that these charming and romantic places were established at all. The camps were a great way to experience the park, before the building of the Going to the Sun Highway, which opened in the 1930's, even though they were certainly considered "roughing it" in the wilds of the magnificent Rocky Mountains of the American West.

Sadly, on August 31, 2017, the wooden interior of the dormitory burned during the Sprague Creek Fire. The exterior stone wall was not destroyed and was stabilized with money raised by the Glacier National Park Conservancy. The inner portion of the grand little hotel is being rebuilt, much to the delight of Glacier Park lovers everywhere.

QUIET! GLACIER

The Issue of Helicopter Overflights



On Logan Pass, these scenic helicopters fragment the high country experience every 15 minutes. Noise pollution gnaws at Glacier's quiet, and it has been increasing for decades.

(Photo courtesy of Mary T. McClelland)

(By Mary T. McClelland)

There is nothing like an inspiring hike to Grinnell Glacier. It includes a restful stop in the shade where the mountain water seeps through the rock wall along the trail. One can take in the spectacular and diverse display of alpine flowers, butterflies and birds, looking for moose in the not so distant marsh. All the senses are filling with natural smells, sights and natural sounds – trickling water, bird calls, insects, and the rare yet unmistakable, overpowering quiet.

For the most part, fellow hikers are there to enjoy these sensations and experiences and are respectful of others sharing the same trail. There's just one problem.

This beauty, peace and quiet is frequently and abruptly broken and chopped into pieces with the thwacking of the next scenic helicopter barging into the air space. On Logan Pass, these scenic helicopters fragment the high country experience every 15 minutes. Noise pollu-

tion gnaws at Glacier's quiet, and it has been increasing for decades.

In the "old days," privately-owned helicopters were contracted by Park Service for rescue, research, administrative work, and fire-fighting in Glacier. The contractors began to offer scenic flights to tourists to fill in their time. The resulting noise pollution increasingly degrades the very resource that visitors come to experience.

A scenic helicopter tour is spectacular for a few people in the aircraft, but it destroys solitude, shatters contemplation, and annoys hundreds of people on the ground. Statistics show that far less than one quarter of one percent of visitors to Glacier take a helicopter ride. Why not

offer an Imax movie tour at visitor centers, remove the helicopters, and leave the skies quiet for everyone to enjoy?

The General Management Plan

The Park Service is on record as wanting to end commercial overflights. Glacier's General Management Plan, in 1998, stated as to Scenic Air Tours: "The preferred alternative is ... to prohibit all commercial sightseeing flights over the park. ... Scenic air tours operating in backcountry areas where peace and solitude have high value for visitors diminish the visitor experience."

The Plan reports that "[o]f the public comments received on this issue, over 90 percent stated concern about disturbance or the appropriateness of overflights. Many said that overflights diminished their experience of the park. ... Much of the concern and comment related to both noise and whether or not such a use is appropriate in Glacier, given its purpose and significance."

The Plan also notes that a wilderness study for Glacier in 1974 identified approximately 95 percent of the park as suitable for preservation as wilderness. Park Service policy requires that proposed wilderness land be managed as wilderness until Congress either formally designates the land as wilderness or rejects the designation.

Administrative Deadlock

The General Management Plan's goal has not been achieved because of deadlock between the park Service and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The FAA has authority over civilian air travel, and it has been unwilling to authorize a ban.

The tours have increased in intensity and frequency. The number of tours in 2014 was 175% of the number in 2013.

Congress passed a law called the National Parks Air Transport Management Act in 2000. It requires the Park Service and the FAA to create an Air Transport Management Plan (ATMP) for each National Park that has more than 50 annual overflights. By the terms of these ATMPs, the agencies can regulate, limit, or prohibit overflights within specific parks.

The statute, however, set no deadline for the creation of ATMPs. The Park Service and the FAA have been unable to agree on what decibel level constitutes a noise problem and a standard for regulation.

Because of this deadlock, overflights have continued year after year. They are authorized under Interim Operating Agreement (IOAs) between the agencies and individual operators.

A lawsuit was filed in 2017 to require the FAA to develop ATMPs for seven National Parks, including Glacier. That lawsuit currently is being reviewed by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. Oral argument is scheduled for November.

The Status Quo in Glacier

Overflights in Glacier are authorized under four IOAs. The tours have increased in intensity and frequency. The number of tours in 2014 was

175% of the number in 2013.

Overall numbers of tours decreased in 2015, 2017 and 2018, when commercial flights were grounded because of wildfires. However, overflights remained very frequent in those years before the fires broke out.

Glacier has the fifth-highest number of scenic tours among National Parks. Because of its very short season (about three months – or two months during fire years!), the flights are concentrated intensely. The impact on visitors is likely greater in Glacier than in other parks.

The Quiet!Glacier Coalition

The Quiet!Glacier Coalition is an effort to inform and mobilize the public on the issue of overflights. Some 33 organizations are members, and more than 33,000 people have signed its petition. It urges the Park Service and the FAA to implement ATMPs and to prioritize Glacier.

The Coalition invites you to visit its website, www.quietglacier.com. You are encouraged to sign and share the group's petition, make a comment, and sign up for updates. On your next visit to Glacier, please document your experience with overflights, send it to the Park Service, and ask for a response.

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*After August 12, 2018, the Howe Ridge Fire forced a full evacuation of the Lake McDonald Valley.
(Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.)*

JOIN THE GLACIER PARK FOUNDATION

All friends of Glacier Park are invited to join the Glacier Park Foundation. Membership includes a subscription to The Inside Trail and the right to vote for directors. Please download a membership form from our Web Site (www.glacier-parkfoundation.org) or send your name, address, phone number, and park experience to Glacier Park Foundation, Box 15641, Minneapolis, MN 55415.

An annual membership in the Foundation costs \$10. A "Friend of the Park" membership costs \$25 annually, cumulating to a Lifetime membership in five installments. A Lifetime membership paid in one installment costs \$100.

The Glacier Park Foundation is a § 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. Contributions are tax deductible to the extent permitted by law.

