

# PEAK EXPERIENCE

VOLUME 19 • NUMBER 2 • FALL 2023



Page 2: What wilderness means

Page 6: Celeste Grace honored as 2023 Old Goat

Page 8: Star Peak Lookout renovations set to begin

[scotchmanpeaks.org](http://scotchmanpeaks.org) • [#savethewildscotchmans](https://www.instagram.com/savethewildscotchmans)

Photo credit: Rebecca Richardson



# Peak Perspectives: What wilderness means

When the larch, aspen, and birch begin to turn their shades of gold and yellow and the huckleberry bushes turn red and are heavy with late season fruit so ripe that a slight breeze makes them drop, we make our way to the high country for an end of season backpacking trip.

My wife and I are sitting around an October campfire. Dinner is over and we are savoring the late season huckleberries we picked for dessert. Our tongues and fingers are purple. In this high basin, we are surrounded by a silence so profound it stirs the soul. We share thoughts and questions unspoken.

I imagine it was a scene like this, somewhere in the Sierra Nevada perhaps, which inspired Nancy Newhall: "Wilderness holds answers to more questions than we have yet learned to ask."

**"Wilderness holds answers to more questions than we have yet learned to ask."**

Campfires have mysteries that capture my attention. The warm flames embrace us and connect us with the ages. These are the same flames my dad and I were mesmerized by when I was young. Campfire flames have burned from the eternity of time before us. They have warmed our ancestors and always been a center around which we gather. Flames which come and go and yet remain the same over eons.

On this cool, crisp autumn night, my wife watches curls of smoke as they rise and swirl up to become part of the milky way. Light from mil-

lions of years away and reaching us on earth just now.

We listen and can hear in the next valley over the ridge as coyotes howl at a rising half-moon.

Wilderness designation means none of this would change. We want places like this and experiences like these to be available for our niece's great grandchildren.

Wilderness is the promise that all our community's children, and their children's children will be able to find the same quiet places we have today. Places for solitude, for self-discovery. Places where they can connect with campfires and ponder the questions that only then rise up in their souls. Places where elk and coyote continue their eternal dance, where the

**"We want places like this and experiences like this to be available for our niece's great grandchildren."**

milky way is revealed by clear skies and alpine larch shine golden in the autumn. Places to turn their fingers



Little Spar Lake.

and tongues purple.

Congressional action is needed to fulfill this promise. Congressional designation of the Scotchman Peaks as Wilderness would mean that the same wild experiences we have today will continue to be available to our kids and their grandkids.

To Wild Places,

**-Phil Hough**



# Featured trail: snowshoeing Spar Lake



A snowshoeing trek to Spar Lake.

**Distance:** 9.5 miles round trip

**Difficulty:** Moderate to strenuous (due to distance and elevation gain)

**Duration:** 5-6 hours

**Description:**

The Spar Lake Snowshoe is a hidden gem for winter enthusiasts, offering a picturesque journey through the snow-covered wilderness with rewarding views of Spar Lake. This nine-mile roundtrip adventure promises solitude, pristine snowscapes, and breathtaking vistas that make it well worth the effort.

**Getting There:**

From MT-56, turn onto Troy Mine Road (westbound; aka Asarco Mine Road). The starting point is located between milepost 24 and 25, a few miles north of Bull Lake. After about 3 miles, park at the intersection by FR-7148. Snowshoe up this road 1.5 miles then follow the signs to Spar Lake.

**Trail Highlights:**

**Forest Wonderland:** The trail starts in a dense, snow-laden forest. Tall ever-

greens draped in snow create a magical winter wonderland atmosphere. As you progress, listen to the gentle crunch of your snowshoes against the snow.

**Gradual Ascent:** prepared for some gradual elevation gain. The snow-covered terrain makes it feel like a true winter wonderland.

**Scenic Overlooks:** Along the way, you'll encounter several scenic overlooks that offer panoramic views of the surrounding mountains and valleys. These make great spots for taking photos and catching your breath.

**Spar Lake Vista:** The highlight of the journey is reaching Spar Lake Vista, where you'll be rewarded with stunning views of Spar Lake nestled among snow-covered peaks. The serene beauty of the frozen lake framed by the mountains is a sight to behold.

**Lunch Stop:** Consider packing a hearty lunch or snacks to enjoy at Spar Lake. Relax, soak in the views, and savor the tranquility of the winter wilderness.

**Return Journey:** After taking in the breathtaking views, retrace your steps back to the trailhead. The return journey allows you to appreciate the scenery from a different perspective.

**Trail Tips:**

- Dress warmly in layers to stay comfortable throughout the day.
- Bring plenty of water and snacks to stay hydrated and energized.
- Check avalanche conditions and carry safety gear if needed.
- Always let someone know your hiking plans and expected return time.
- Respect the environment by practicing Leave No Trace principles.

This snowshoe adventure to Spar Lake promises not only a great winter workout but also an opportunity to connect with nature and revel in the beauty of the snowy wilderness. Be prepared, stay safe, and make lasting memories on this fantastic winter trail.

**-Juli Thurston**



# Voices in the Wilderness: Ella Beck



On the fourth floor of College Hall in Spokane, Washington, the scribbles of a graphite pencil on the back of a quiz was where my wild summer started. On the front, I had mused over the Environmental Kuznets Curve and how climate change impacts wildfires in the PNW. On the back, only a few words were written: FSPW—backcountry ranger—apply online. Backcountry ranger was underlined three times. To say I was excited was an understatement. I grew up in Hawaii, surrounded by water, rain, lush green plants, zero bears—an entirely different environment than what I was about to step

**"On the back, only a few words were written: FSPW—backcountry ranger—apply online."**

into. Beginning this summer with zero expectations contributed to the profound impact it had on the way I understand myself, humanity, and this world we live in.

As a D1 athlete and student at Gonzaga University, anxiety, pressure, overproductivity, and perfectionism are things that I deal with and attempt to control everyday. I've



Ella Beck.

always put pressure on myself to consistently perform athletically and academically, and in my free time this pressure manifests as a need to be productive at all times. If my time in the wilderness was good for one thing, it was good for my mental health. I honestly believe there is no remedy to an overactive mind quite like nature, wilderness especially. In so many aspects of life, pressure to succeed and produce and improve can take over. We value ourselves on what we produce, on how much and how fast we improve. If this is how we value ourselves, what does that mean for the other wonderfully human ways we exist? In the wilderness, I have learned to value myself just because I am there, because I am existing, because I'm breathing.





I notice the little fly dancing across the surface of the creek, the distant sound of a woodpecker and its soothing repetition, the smell of huckleber-

**"In the wilderness, I have learned to value myself just because I am there, because I am existing, because I'm breathing."**

ries and the astonishing bright pink fireweed.

My wild summer was wonderful for many reasons. I learned so much about this environment, how to use a cross cut and a pulaski, how to live in a Forest Service bunkhouse with 12 other 20-something year olds, and

more. I am proud of my time spent in the wilderness, about the conversations I've had with people on the trail, in their own ways all curious and enthusiastic about protecting wild land. The thing with wilderness is it pulls you back in. The more time you spend in it, with it, the more time you want to dedicate to it. More than wanting to encourage everyone to get out into the wild, I want to encourage everyone to notice the wild all around them. Every tree in town, no matter if it's planted or not, is a part of nature. All the leaves scattering the road, the bees and the dragonflies and even the crows. It is all around us and it is valuable without measure. The wilderness is a place for every-

thing to breathe, nature and us, and protecting it is protecting ourselves as well.

Voices in the Wilderness is an ongoing storytelling project that FSPW started in 2013 as a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act. It aims to highlight the diversity of people in our community that love wild places through stories that touch upon people's connection to our rugged backyard.

*Author Note: Ella was FSPW backcountry ranger intern during the 2023 summer trail season stationed out of the Trout Creek Ranger Station in the Cabinet Mountain District.*



# Celeste Grace honored



This summer at our annual State of the Scotchmans party, Celeste Grace was crowned the “Old Goat” of the year. Our highest volunteer honor, the Old Goat award has nothing to do with age and everything to do with spirit. I was intrigued by her story and wanted to get to know her a little better so I invited her to chat over a beer one evening.

**Hey Celeste! First, how did your**

**relationship with wilderness began?**

Well, I have always loved the outdoors, and I have a few really impactful and influential memories from my childhood that helped shape this. I was born in Colorado but grew up on the east coast in New Hampshire. My family used to travel in our Volkswagon bus to various places around the U.S. which always felt like an adventure. I also had a friend whose father was a big hiker. I

was like 9 or 10 when he started taking my friend and I on big hikes, so he really helped plant that seed of passion for getting outside.

**I love that you were able to have so much connection to hiking and the outside world early on in life. What brought you to Sandpoint?**

**“My family used to travel in our Volkswagon bus to various places around the U.S.”**

I had an ill mother in Missoula and I moved out here to be closer to her in 2011. My ex-husband found a job in Sandpoint and he actually sent me all these amazing things about Idaho so I agreed to move here, sight unseen. I had a friend who said I had to hike Scotchman Peak when I got to Idaho. So I did! And at the top, Phil (Hough) and Brad (Smith) happened to be up there having a mountain top meeting about something and they asked me what I was doing there. I told them that I had just moved here and was looking for a job or something to do in the area.

**Wow, that seems like a pretty fated meeting. How wild! So this is 2011 when you met them? What was your first involvement with FSPW like?**

So after that mountain top meeting, I went to a presentation. FSPW was just starting the wolverine game camera monitoring project. At that meeting I met Mary Franzel and Sandi and Jim Mellen, and then I became heavily involved with the wolverine project.



# Longtime volunteer is 2023 Old Goat

My first monitoring station assignment was with Mary and Sandi. There were two stations for us to check 12 miles out. We were on skis, and a friend had agreed to tow us part of the way on a snowmobile. When we got to the 12-mile point, the farthest station, the snowmobile died. So I'm out there in the snow with these two women I hardly knew, and we're out of cell range and still have another station to do, and we have all this stuff on the snowmobile. My first thought was that we should just put all the stuff on our back and continue on, and I wasn't sure how they would react to that plan. But they both said the same thing and we did it. We skied out way after dark and none of our spouses knew where we were and that really solidified our friendship. Never saw a wolverine but we saw a bunch of other cool stuff that winter.

**What other work have you done with FSPW since the wolverine project? You've been volunteering with the Friends for 12 years now, what brings you back year after year?**

I was the newsletter editor, I've been part of group hikes and also led group hikes. Things we try to do every year are a gourmet hike or ski, Winter Tracks, trail work, and cross-cut saw certification. The cross-cut saw certification was instrumental to a lot of the work we did on trail 999 and the reroute of the Scotchman Peak trail — I did a lot of work on that. One of my favorite things to do with Mary Franzel is a Scotchman Peak hike for beginners, since I think it's always very fun and very rewarding.

**The Scotchman Peak trail is a**

**tough trail! What does a group hike for beginners look like?**

We limit the group size to six or eight, and we get people who have never been there before. It's a no-drop hike, so nobody gets left behind and we make a positive and rational experience for everyone. If that means we don't summit, it's not a big deal.

I guess I keep coming back because I'm passionate about wild things and trying to preserve the wild around us. I also love sharing this passion with newbies and watching their transformation is so magical. And sharing the passion with old FSPW friends is always full of adventure glory and laughs.

**You're right, it is pretty magical to share one of your favorite wild places with a new friend. What else do you do around Sandpoint?**

**"I guess I keep coming back because I'm passionate about wild things and trying to preserve the wild around us."**

I'm a trail runner, and I take advantage of whatever outdoor sports are available. For my "day job," I'm a large animal veterinarian. I also volunteer for Kaniksu Land Trust, Pend Oreille Pedalers, Sandpoint Nordic Club, and 101 Women. I think you reach a point in your life when it's time to give back and it's beneficial to everybody.

**Do you have a favorite secret spot in the Scotchmans that you're willing to divulge?**

Ooh! I have a favorite hike that I've done twice now. Once in one direction

and once the other direction, both memorable. The Scotchman Triple. So it's Goat, Scotchman, and Scotchman 2 all in one day, and it usually involves epic tales that cannot be repeated. I think that was organized by Jim Mellen, which makes sense.

**We're getting into some very important questions now: What is your favorite trail snack? Followed by: What is your favorite kind of hiking sock?**

So my favorite trail liquid is for trail running: Vermont maple syrup and water and salt. Otherwise, it's whatever fruit we've dehydrated or peanut M&Ms or almonds, and that's it. I think those are the four food groups.

I'm a wool sock person and I do knit my own socks, but I don't hike in them. They're for after the hike. But probably darn tough because of the lifetime guarantee but I don't think any sock should have a lifetime guarantee because wearing through socks is just what happens. But I like that they honor that anyway.

**Wool socks are the way to go! I'm so appreciative and inspired by our talk. I'll end with asking: What are you looking forward to right now?**

I've been a large animal vet for 33 years, and it's a risky job, so my goal is to retire before I get injured. I really look forward to doing more volunteer work and doing more trips and really putting in the charge to getting this wilderness designation for the future, which is so so important.

**I couldn't agree more. Thanks again, Celeste! See you soon.**

**-Rose Olson**



# Star Peak Lookout facelift forthcoming



Photo credit: Justin Maisch

As you're driving westbound on Highway 200 from Montana into Idaho, you might catch a glimpse of a lookout tower way up on top of a peak to the right of you if you happen to look up at just the right moment. The Star Peak Lookout, near Heron, Montana was the very first lookout tower in the state of Montana. This summer, progress has begun on a much-needed restoration project supported by the Great American Outdoors Act. The Northwest Montana Lookout Association (NMLA) has been hard at work updating the structure and ensuring it will remain standing for years to come.

The original rock house on Star Peak, built in 1910, still sits below the current lookout which was built around 1957 by the Forest Service.

This historic lookout is a hip roof "L-4" cab structure. Along with the lookout and the old stone house, there are also two helipads and a classic out-house that sit atop the peak. Situated in the Cabinet Mountains, within the proposed Scotchman Peak Wilderness area, Star Peak sits at an elevation of 6167' and the lookout was actively staffed from 1906-2003.

Restoration efforts began this summer in early June when all windows were removed and flown off the mountain by the Kootenai National Forest Helitack Crew. The windows will be reconditioned over the winter and flown back up the mountain to be reinstalled next spring. NMLA volunteers Bob & Seth Lambrecht, Justin Maisch, and Mark Miller were this summer's crew. They reroofed

the structure with new cedar shingles, scraped and painted the exterior, and addressed any failing structural issues. Window shutter material was painted this year in preparation for building new shutters in 2024 to be installed over the reconditioned and reinstalled windows. Jeff Grotjohn, of the Cabinet Back Country Horsemen, supported this project by transporting the tools and supplies that weren't airlifted in early June along with Cabinet Ranger District personnel.

Thanks to these incredible volunteers, we will be able to enjoy and appreciate the Star Peak Lookout for years to come, allowing the future generations to visit the structure and enjoy a glimpse into the experiences of the many Lookouts that previously served in our Star Peak Lookout tower.

-Brooke Bolin

find us on facebook • instagram



## From the Peak Experience archives: Autumn 2006

3

PEAK EXPERIENCE



### What Grows There – Lobster Mushrooms

By Jon Burkhardt

Mushroom enthusiasts who frequent the Cabinet Mountains dread the long hot days of summer because spring and fall are the most productive times of the year for edible mushrooms. However a summer rain can cause a bloom of one of the most delectable fungi in our area. The lobster mushroom is large, bright orange and easily spotted in the heavily forested areas of the Cabinets.

This is actually a parasite of other mushrooms which takes over the fruiting body of fungi like *Russula* and changes it into lobster mushrooms. It forms a smooth shell which has no gills or tubes and becomes the color of a cooked lobster. They have pure white flesh and are delicious fried or prepared as any other mushroom in soups, frittatas, stir fries, etc. This mushroom has a very nice texture and adds a pretty red color to any dish. They dry

well and are sold commercially in grocery stores and used frequently in restaurants.

As they age they become deeper red and the flesh becomes brownish and are not as appetizing. They can bloom well into the fall and can be quite numerous in the right conditions.

Most mushrooms books will have information to identify them under the name *Hypomyces lactifluorum*. Keep your eyes peeled and you can enjoy fresh mushrooms in the dog days of summer. (I picked four pounds this year on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August.) See Connie Burkhardt's recipe for sautéed Lobster Mushrooms on page 7.



**Lobster Mushroom**  
Photo courtesy Neil Wimberley

### Scotchman Rocks

By Bill Martin

The Scotchman Peaks are not as tall as they were when I first got here. By the time I'm gone, they'll be shorter yet. This is because sea-level, the constant from which we measure elevation, is rising. Global warming, along with its other effects, causes mountains to shrink.

They were over 300 feet higher 15,000 years ago at the peak of the last ice age. The Cordilleran ice sheet, moving south down the Purcell trench, covered the site of Sandpoint then, reaching the southern end of Lake Pend Orielle, which was formed by its terminal moraine (a terminal moraine being the gravel, clay and boulders bulldozed up at a glacier's leading edge).

There were numerous ice ages during the last 2 million years, but since each advancing ice sheet obliterated the evidence of its predecessor, we have a clear record of only two. The evidence of the former one (about 100,000 years ago) is still there because its ice was thicker and it advanced further south, to the north end of Lake Coeur d'Alene, which was formed by that terminal moraine.

During each of these ice ages, glaciers damned the Clark Fork valley at the Montana/Idaho border to create glacial Lake Missoula (about which more next time). Ice also came down the Bull River valley as far (the last time) as the south

end of Bull Lake (which was formed by, etc.).

In both cases the great ice sheet moved on both sides, but not over, the Scotchman Peaks. Had it done so, we would have Scotchman knobs, glacially rounded mountains such as those on both sides of the Purcell trench north of Sandpoint.

Instead, local glaciers in each drainage vied with each other to spectacularly splinter the mountain tops.

A last vestige of these glaciers may still be seen across the Bull River valley to the east of the Scotchmans behind Snowshoe Peak in the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness – Blackwell glacier. It is still technically a glacier rather than a snowfield only because it has been there continuously for over 15,000 years. Yet, some

summer it will melt away completely.

Unless, of course, we enter another ice age. Though currently not the most popular conjecture, it's been postulated that global warming could trigger the onset of one.

Who knows? Robert Frost (or was it Sandburg) wrote something like "Some say fire, some say ice. As for me, fire's nice, But ice will suffice."

Next time: The humongous, really big flood.



**Moon Over Scotchman** Photo courtesy Rocket Reed



# Working trails for wilderness

The summer of 2023 was a great one for wilderness lovers everywhere. Volunteers laced up their hiking boots and hefted their polaskis to improve trails and keep hikers safe. Want to contribute? Just check out [scotchmanpeaks.org/volunteer](https://scotchmanpeaks.org/volunteer)!







## Join a winter hike!

Hiking: It's not just for the summer months! Unique pleasures abound in trekking snow-covered landscapes and experiencing a different side of our wild backyard. It's an opportunity to learn about winter ecosystems and be enthralled by beautiful snowy vistas. Plus, getting out there couldn't be easier. Just visit [scotchmanpeaks.org/hikes-events-schedule](http://scotchmanpeaks.org/hikes-events-schedule) and join a guided hike to make new friends and learn new things. Here are just a few already scheduled and ready to inspect:

**Jan. 6:** New Year Hike – Star Peak

**Jan. 13:** Hiking with Kids!

**Jan. 14:** Regal Creek hike

**Jan. 16:** Ross Creek Cedars hike

**Jan. 17:** Goat Mountain hike

**Feb. 3:** Annual Ross Creek Cedars snowshoe

**Feb. 10:** Dry Creek Wildlife ID and Tracking with Wild Montana

**Feb. 24:** Snow Moon snowsho

**Feb. 25:** Star Peak Viewing snowshoe



## Our Mission

We're uniting thousands of people from Idaho and Montana to pass on a Scotchman Peaks Wilderness for our children and grandchildren.



Situated along the Idaho-Montana border, Scotchman Peaks is an 88,000-acre roadless where wildlife and people can roam free.

## Save us a stamp!

Contact [info@scotchmanpeaks.org](mailto:info@scotchmanpeaks.org) and ask to receive Peak Experience by email rather than snail mail.





*Friends of Scotchman Peaks Wilderness, Inc.  
PO Box 2061, Sandpoint, ID 83864*

## **SAVE THE WILD SCOTCHMANS!** **Donate to FSPW**

To donate, visit our website or mail in the form below to: PO Box 2061, Sandpoint, ID 83864.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ \$25   ☐ \$50   ☐ \$100   ☐ \$200   ☐ \$\_\_\_\_\_

**Donate Monthly** ☐ \$\_\_\_\_\_

**\*Other ways to give:** Learn about leaving a legacy  
at <https://www.scotchmanpeaks.org/endowment>

### **Board**

#### **Chair**

Mark Cochran, Sandpoint, ID

#### **Secretary**

Megan Leach, Libby, MT

#### **Vice-Chair**

Ed Robinson, Sandpoint, ID

#### **Board of Directors**

Chris Compton, Heron, MT  
Rebecca Sanchez, Sandpoint, ID

#### **Treasurer**

Brad Williams, Sandpoint, ID  
.....

### **Staff**

#### **Executive Director**

Phil Hough

#### **MT Outreach Coordinator**

Brooke Bolin

#### **Communications & Engagement Manager**

Rose Olson

#### **Sanders Co. Coordinator**

Juli Thurston

#### **Communications Specialist**

Cameron Rasmuson

**[scotchmanpeaks.org](https://www.scotchmanpeaks.org) • find us on facebook • instagram**