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The mission of the Independence Pass Foundation is to protect the ecological, historical, and aesthetic integrity of the Independence Pass corridor and to encourage stewardship, safety, and appreciation of the Pass.



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Jon Chapman: Our Man on the Pass

By Gail Holstein

The Independence Pass corridor is one of the most special places on Earth. And working to keep it that way is volunteer Forest Service Ranger Jon Chapman. For over 20 years, Jon has been “our man on the Pass.” Jon gives generously of his time and expertise to keep the pass corridor almost as pristine as it was when it was a sacred refuge for the Ute Indians. And he does it for FREE.



photo © Gail Holstein

Every summer he spends at least three days a week at the 12,095-foot summit, Grizzly Reservoir, or the old town of Ruby. He is the friendly man in the Forest Service uniform who patrols campgrounds, waves to visitors, answers their questions, and educates them on any subject from geology to bears. He is the man with the mop who makes sure the restrooms are cleaned properly. He is the guy who does his best, with little or no budget, to patch weathered fencing and maintain popular trails. His quiet dedication contributes immeasurably to our enjoyment

of the wonderland in our backyard. He does all a man can do to keep it from being “loved to death.” How many 80 year olds have that kind of energy?

Jon arrived in Aspen in 1957 with a degree in physics and a willingness to take any job that would keep him here. His story may sound familiar to today's young, educated workforce: he worked construction and landscaping, taught skiing, and toiled in ski shops.

What he did best was to design and build things. In the 70s he had a furniture shop in a Sears-Roebuck “kit house” on Hopkins Street, which still exists in upgraded form (protected from extinction by historic preservation rules). In the 80s he designed and built solar houses and

did consulting for builders. His first job for the Forest Service was the “bunkers” at Maroon Bells. He received no pay, but his time there taught him that, despite necessary government bureaucracy, the Forest Service had “great people.” He was hooked.

And then the Pass called him. He observed that there was always something to be done up there. Not just on the summit, but in campgrounds, at the ghost town, in parking areas. Always the gentleman, always ready to help or inform,

Jon became the quintessential Forest Service volunteer. The Pass is not his only beat. On his days off he checks out Warren Lakes, Larkspur Mountain, Castle Creek, Lincoln Creek, and the Hunter valley – wherever nature is impacted by people.

Martha Moran, Recreation Staff Supervisor for the huge Aspen/Sopris Ranger District, has frequently nominated him for the National Volunteer Award. He won it in 2012 – a fact he modestly neglects to mention. Moran points out that, if paid, his time would have been worth over \$350,000.

“I just need to be useful,” Jon says. In winter, living in a converted Greyhound bus near Wickenburg, Arizona, he volunteers for the Nature Conservancy at the Hassayampa River Preserve. In summer he stays in a small RV parked behind the Forest Service building on the S-curves and drives his fuel-efficient car to “work.”

Jon Chapman recently got a new left knee, and he will hobble around with a crutch for the first part of the summer. But you can bet that, as soon as he's able, you'll spot him up on the Pass, doing what he does so well.



photo © Martha Moran

continued inside >

First, and somewhat counterintuitively, flowers do better proven to be a key evolutionary strategy allowing wildflowers to flourish above tree line. Indeed scientists have learned that Staying low to the ground and out of the worst weather has and found that they, too, were warm. and the earth radiated a sun-baked heat. I touched the flowers the first time all day I was warm. The relentless wind calmed a close-up, I realized that for Spraying on the ground for Moss Campion, Geissler Mountain @ Karin Teague

One of the great ways to spend a July day in the Roaring Fork Valley is roaming the tundra of Independence Pass, where ethereal blue forget-me-nots and other classic alpine flowers carpet the landscape, eager to bloom and reproduce in the short window before winter returns to the high country. On a recent walk atop Geissler Mountain a mat of cheery moss campion enticed me to stop and take photographs.

Why alpine flowers seem so large compared to their green parts—they are! This way, the plant can flower and set seed early, giving its seeds enough time to ripen in the warmth of the summer sun. And wasn't it just a handful of weeks ago that we were skiing these slopes? How do these delicate beauties survive winter at 13,000 feet?



Moss Campion, Geissler Mountain @ Karin Teague

Welcome, Wildflowers!

By Karin Teague

Another way the flowers survive the winter is by “hardening,” or acclimating to increasingly colder temperatures. In the fall, the flower's membranes become more permeable, and water moves out of the cell's living cytoplasm and into the intercellular spaces where growing crystals don't hurt the plant. The increased concentration within the cell also lowers the interior's freezing point. In this way, moss campion can withstand temperatures as low as 320 degrees below zero in the winter (that's right—320 degrees below), when a relatively balmy 14 degrees above zero in the summer would kill it.

Knowing what these tough, tiny flowers endure in the winter, and seeing them out in the summer for their several weeks of glory, fulfilling their life mission—making more life—never fails to move me. Add to that their exquisite beauty, devised solely to enlist members of an entirely different kingdom in the cause of reproduction, and you have one of evolution's great stories. Right up there with the skier making perfect S-turns down Fourth of July Bowl.



Welcome, Wildflowers!

continued from front cover

under the snow than on open ground. A blanket of snow keeps the plants and the soil under them at a relatively stable 34 degrees, as opposed to the widely fluctuating air temperatures that a flower on bare ground must endure. In the alpine, just a foot of snow can mean a 60-degree temperature differential between the snow-covered soil (at freezing) and the air just above it. The snow cover also protects the plants from drying winds, ice blast, and solar radiation.

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Clockwise from upper right: Broomrape, Twin Lakes; Shooting Star, Half Moon; Sky Pilot, Summit; Colorado Columbine, Lost Man; Indian Paintbrush, Ptarmigan Creek; Forget Me Nots, Geissler Mountain; Alpine Violet, Linkins Lake. All photos © Karin Teague.



NEWS FROM THE TOP



NEWSLETTER
SUMMER 2016



2016 Summer & Fall Projects

1 Winter Gate restoration

Work has begun at the winter closure gate area! Look for an attractive new hand-stacked rock wall and berm replacing the old weed-infested berm to the north of the parking area. This Fall IPF will plant native trees, shrubs and flowers along the berm, further shielding the view into the CDOT storage and rock dump site.

2 Lost Man Trail work weekend

Join IPF, Wilderness Workshop, Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers and the US Forest Service for a weekend-long Lost Man trail restoration project August 26-28. This enormously popular trails runs through delicate tundra & riparian areas, rendering it badly in need of some TLC. Even if you can't devote a weekend, come out and spend a day giving back to this gem of a trail. Go to www.wildernessworkshop.org or www.rfov.org to learn more & to register.

3 Noxious weed eradication

In partnership with the Forest Service and Pitkin County and with the help of determined board members and other volunteers, IPF will continue its efforts to control outbreaks of invasive weeds on the Pass, including yellow toadflax, Canada and plumeless thistle, spotted knapweed, and oxeye daisy. These non-natives threaten to denigrate the natural ecology of the Pass and displace the native species that make the Pass one of the great wildflower drives in the country.

4 Outrageous Overhangs restoration

In a partnership begun last year with work on the popular Classy Cliffs climbing trail, IPF is again teaming with RFOV and the Ute Mountaineer to restore and stabilize the treacherous, badly eroding entry trail to the Outrageous Overhangs climbing area.

5 Science on the Pass

Along with the monitoring station being installed near the summit (see "Science on the Summit" article), students from CMC will be establishing at the same location a cover composition (vegetation) plot, in order to collect data on the timing, types and numbers of high alpine plant species that grow there and how these change over time.

6 Student tree plantings

Continuing our decades-long partnership with the Aspen School District, over a hundred kids from grades 3-8 will plant native trees and shrubs to stabilize and restore slopes along the corridor, forever connecting the students with "their" trees and the Pass.

Almost all of IPF's projects are staffed by volunteers—if you would like to join us for a morning of weed whacking, tree planting, trash collecting or trail work, give us a call!

Clockwise from right: IPF staff and board, photo © Jim Anathan; Aspen Community School tree planters, photos © Karin Teague.



Science on the Summit

By Elise Osenga

The Roaring Fork Valley is no stranger to change. It has been blanketed by glaciers, provided leafy vegetation for mastodons, been a hunting ground for nomadic peoples, and attracted miners who extracted ore. Today, conditions in the Roaring Fork Valley support a ski resort, hiking destination, and home for a growing population of humans. Although change has always contributed to this area's geography, many changes shaping the Roaring Fork Valley today differ significantly from past changes in critical ways.

As the global climate warms, the local climate of the Roaring Fork Valley is undergoing changes also. Unlike shifts that occurred in Earth's climate in the past, which took place over hundreds of thousands of years, the current rate of increase in average atmospheric temperatures is occurring on a scale of just centuries. In order to identify local impacts of these shifts, we need a baseline of current conditions to help us understand the ecology and climate of our region. Soil moisture, for example, plays a vital role in ecology, helping determine vegetation ranges, groundwater flows, and ground temperatures, all of which determine what kind of plants grow at certain locations, and when they leaf out or bloom.

Until recently, however, ecological soil moisture measurements were uncommon in the Roaring Fork Valley. To fill this gap, in 2012 the Aspen Global Change Institute, with funding from local governments, non-profits and foundations, established the Roaring Fork Observation Network (iRON) a network of eight stations covering a variety of ecosystem types and elevations within the watershed where data can be collected and data shared for decades to come. Each station measures air temperature, rain, soil temperature at an 8 inch depth and soil moisture at 2, 8, and 20 inch depths.



This summer, a new station will be added on Pitkin County Land near the summit of Independence Pass, adding an entirely new ecozone to the iRON: the vulnerable high alpine ecosystem. With additional funding from IPF, this station will also measure snow depth and be equipped with a camera that will take still photographs 365 days a year, providing the public with a first-ever glimpse into conditions at 12,000 feet on the Pass in all four seasons.

AGCI's hope for the iRON is that it will provide a watershed-wide perspective of the Roaring Fork Watershed, helping to inform management policies and public understanding of climate change impacts. Independence Pass, with its fragile mountain flora, is a very special component of this watershed.

For further information, go to <https://www.agci.org/project/iron>

Photo top: Independence Pass Site, photo © AGCI.
Photo bottom left: Monitoring Station, photo © Adam Korenblat.

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Thank you one and all!

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We are deeply grateful.