

FORREST McCARTHY

MADISON: This is Mark Madison. It's March 4th, 2009, and I have with me Forrest McCarthy, who is a mountain guide and a geographer. Just finished up a very interesting in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. He's come to NCTC to talk about it this evening and he was kind enough this afternoon to put aside a little time to do a quick Podcast here.

So, Forrest, tell us a little about your background.

McCARTHY: Thanks, Mark, for having me here. I'm really excited to be at NCTC.

Yeah, I've kind of got a diverse background. I mean, it all kind of centered around, I guess, you know, exploration and adventuring in wild places in one way, form or another.

I've been working as a mountain guide for nearly 20 years now. I work for XM Mountain Guides in Wyoming. Most of my guiding has been on the Grand Teton and Wind Rivers, but I've been fortunate enough -- I worked for a company, Alpine Ascents International for a few years and got to guide in South America in Aconcagua and Vinson Massif in Antarctica. And been on 10 expeditions on Denali in Alaska. And also I've done some guiding for the U.S. Antarctic Program. So I spent a bunch of time down there as well. Also worked as a wildlife biologist studying wolverines for the Wildlife Conservation Society.

And got my master's degrees in physical geography, although I was actually -- what led me -- my bachelor's was in outdoor education from Prescott College, but doing a lot of the work I was doing in the Arctic and Antarctica, it got

me interested in graduate work, and so I studied physical geography at the University of Wyoming.

MADISON: Great. Tell us a little about what you're going to talk about tonight in your presentation.

McCARTHY: So in 2006 I was very fortunate, I got invited to join George Schaller with his 50th anniversary expedition to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. George Schaller, when he was 23 years old, when he was a graduate student himself, a master's candidate at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, himself and Brina Kessel and Bob Krear, who I was at the University of Wyoming at the time, joined Olaus and Mardy Murie to spend the summer in the Sheenjek Valley of the Arctic Refuge.

50 years later, George returned to the Arctic Refuge. He hadn't been there -- that was his first time back, believe it or not, and so it was very, very exciting to get to go back there with him.

And keeping in the spirit of the '56 expedition, George Schaller and the expedition organizer, Jonathan Waterman, invited three graduate students, and I got chosen as one of those three graduate students, and at the time, as I said, I was in graduate school, and needed to come up with a thesis, and so I wanted to somehow integrate that trip into my thesis work in physical geography.

Luckily at the University of Wyoming Geography Department there had been some expertise in former students that had done a lot of work on documenting landscape change through repeat photography. So that became kind of a real obvious way to do it, and it had a real neat historical element because a lot of the photos I duplicated were from the original '56 Murie

expedition, and a lot of the focus of the expedition was to look at how things like climate change and energy development are impacting Arctic Alaska. So I was able to really have -- incorporate that into my thesis as well.

MADISON: So, Forrest, did you find evidence of global climate change in Arctic Refuge?

McCARTHY: I found impacts that -- of the impacts of climate change in the Arctic that are consistent with a lot of other research. I mean, I didn't personally collect any weather data or climate data, but according to a lot of other research that -- the known warming in Arctic Alaska is driving the advancement of tree cover, shrub cover, recession of glaciers, and all my photographs were consistent with those -- with that other research.

MADISON: Great. Well, besides scientific research, it was also a hell of an expedition, and you probably have a lot of stories. You were out there a while. You were with very interesting people. But would you share one of your interesting adventure stories with us in Arctic?

McCARTHY: Certainly the highlight was at the end of the expedition -- part of it -- was when George Schaller was there back in 1956, he had left Olaus and Mardy Murie at Last Lake and said, "Hey, I'm going to go back -- I just want to go up for a 10-day hike. I'll be back." And he thought he would be shorter -- it would take him a shorter period of time, but he didn't want to worry Mardy Murie, so he told her he would be gone 10 days, and some real basic simple supplies went out, and it was also -- keep in mind that that was the same summer the USGS was making the first good maps of the area, and he went out and did this about 200-mile trek through what is now the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and

he took photographs. So part of my research is I wanted to go and duplicate those photographs, which gave me a good excuse to convince Jonathan Waterman, and to save the expedition some money, and one of our other graduate students -- so instead of flying back to Arctic village in Fairbanks from Last Lake, they got -- the expedition bought us a seat on a mail flight from Kaptovic (phonetic), and myself and Martin Robards, one of the other graduate students traversed the Brooks Range and got to follow George's footsteps up to the very head of the Sheenjek Valley and the Sheenjek Glacier.

MADISON: That's great. Well, Forrest, thanks for your time. We're really looking forward to your presentation tonight, and thanks again for coming out to NCTC this spring. Looking forward to it.

McCARTHY: Is it already spring? Doesn't feel like it in D.C.

MADISON: No, it doesn't feel like it!

McCARTHY: Felt like spring when I left Wyoming, but it's colder in D.C. than it is in Jackson Hole.

MADISON: End of winter, I guess. So thanks again, Forrest. Appreciate it.

McCARTHY: You're welcome. Thanks for having me.

MADISON: I'm sure it's a little warmer than Arctic.