



SUMMER 2019
NEWSLETTER



2019—The Year of the Avalanche

Experts are calling it a “one in 300-year event.”



Highway 82-crossing avalanche on east side of Pass near MM 73

By Karin Teague

ON JULY 4, 2018, Roaring Fork Valley residents watched in horror as Basalt Mountain erupted in a terrifying conflagration just above its namesake town. For two months the fire burned 13,000 tinder-dry acres and filled the valley’s sky with smoke.

This July 4th, many of those same residents will celebrate by skiing the holiday’s namesake slope, July 4 Bowl on Independence Pass, enjoying breathtaking views of snow-covered peaks and a verdant valley below. What a difference a year makes!

continued inside >

2019—The Year of the Avalanche, *continued from front cover* >

Even more remarkable than the amount of snow we received this winter compared to last is the avalanche activity that accompanied the snowfall. Experts are calling some of the slides that occurred this past March “one in 300-year events.” Trees dislodged up the Lincoln Creek corridor on Independence Pass are proof of that assertion. When trees that big come down, it means no large avalanches have occurred on those slopes for hundreds of years – if ever.

Living Through the Year of the Avalanche at Grizzly Camp

On April 13, when a ski companion and I knocked on Glenn and Kim Schryver’s front door at Grizzly Camp, they looked like they were seeing ghosts. Grizzly Camp is a compound of residences and maintenance buildings set at 10,800 feet next to Grizzly Reservoir on Independence Pass. The Schryvers live and work there year-round. They are employed by the Twin Lakes Reservoir and Canal Company to maintain the tunnels, gates, and other equipment that divert water from the Roaring Fork River and its tributaries through the Continental Divide to Twin Lakes.



Glenn & Kim Schryver at Grizzly Camp, April 13, 2019

Nobody had been up to their place all winter – and with good reason. Never before in the Schryvers’ eleven years at Grizzly Camp have they seen so many avalanches in the Lincoln Creek corridor: at least ten in the six-and-a-half-mile stretch between the reservoir and Highway 82. Reaching Grizzly Camp last April involved skiing around entire groves of Aspen trees scattered like pickup sticks, climbing over and under upside-down evergreens five feet in diameter, and crossing debris-littered snow fields reminiscent of glaciers. The road and creek, which previously defined the valley, were in spots impossible to locate. If Glenn hadn’t already set



Avalanche in front of Schryvers' home (see buildings on right)

Several hundred year-old Engelmann spruce up Lincoln Creek



a narrow track on his snowmobile the week prior, using a chain saw to break through downed trees and relying on his sixth sense about the approximate location of the road, we never would have reached Grizzly Camp.

Even the resourceful Schryvers weren’t able to find a way out of Grizzly Camp for most of March. Their usual route is through the four-mile tunnel that cuts through the mountains of the Continental Divide to Lake Creek and Highway 82 on the east side of the Pass. Water from Grizzly Reservoir flows through the tunnel to feed Twin Lakes Reservoir, where it is used by front range municipalities and other stakeholders. When water isn’t running through the tunnel, as in winter, the tunnel is dry and drive-able – at least for those without claustrophobia issues. The tunnel is so tight you can’t open the passenger doors on a mid-side car.

This year the Schryvers’ usual means of escape was impeded by two enormous avalanches that slid across Highway 82 on the east side of the Pass, effectively cutting them off from Twin Lakes. When CDOT finally cleared the debris from the road, the Schryvers found the mouth of the tunnel’s exit blocked by snow. Meanwhile, back at Grizzly Camp, they were subjected to a series of avalanches that came eerily close to their home and kept them largely housebound. After three weeks of hunkering down, they finally made it to Buena Vista, where they normally go to see family, shop, and remember how to talk to people other than each other.



Highway 82 near MM 53

What the Year of the Avalanche Means for Independence Pass

First, the good news. CDOT was able to clear the historic slides on both sides of the Pass by May 31, just a week later than Highway 82’s traditional opening. The Schryvers accomplished the same on Lincoln Creek Road in June.



Lincoln Creek Road

Also, while the dozen or so avalanches that hammered the Lincoln Creek corridor took out thousands of trees and left many of Lincoln Creek’s forty-plus campsites covered in debris, as of this writing the Independence Pass Foundation and its volunteers have begun working with the Forest Service to clear the sites for summer camping. Rather amazingly, all but one of the twenty-two bear boxes stationed at Lincoln’s dispersed campsites survived.

Less clear is the state of the hiking trails up the Lincoln Creek corridor, including New York and Grizzly Lake trails. As of this writing, they are still under snow, and we won’t know how the avalanches up those drainages impacted trails until later this month. IPF and its volunteers will be prepared to help clear or reroute those trails as needed.



Dispersed campsite #7 with bear box intact

The more difficult news, perhaps, is that downed Engelmann spruce, which make up most of the trees felled by avalanches in the Lincoln Creek corridor, are prime breeding territory for the spruce beetle. The spruce beetle, *Dendroctonus rufipennis*, is a native bark beetle that has already affected two million acres, or 40%, of Colorado’s spruce forests since 1996. According to experts, we may see spruce beetle move into these avalanche zones this summer. There they will lay eggs, hatch next year, then move to neighboring trees. Signs of infestation could appear in 2021.

The spruce beetle, like an avalanche, is a natural phenomenon – and one that, like an avalanche, we cannot stave off. With our large numbers of spruce, though, it is a phenomenon that could profoundly alter the landscape of Independence Pass.

So while we are unlikely to see anything like the avalanches of 2019 again in our lifetimes – which is something to stop and consider and look upon with awe – we may live with the repercussions for decades to come. ■

— NEW FACES ON THE PASS —

IPF welcomes its first intern, Emily Downing

by Gail Holstein

IF YOU SHOULD SPOT a radiant young woman, perhaps accompanied by a sweet border collie, poking around Independence Pass this summer, you're in luck.

Shake her hand. You'll be glad you met IPF's intern Emily Downing.

Emily will be collecting data to supplement an uncomfortable lack of high-altitude information about our state. Her plan is to camp on the Pass, observing and enjoying, and to convert some of her discoveries into useable facts and figures.

Specifically, Emily will be helping IPF collect and analyze data on alpine flora and fauna and snow and soil conditions, which will be incorporated into ongoing studies by IPF partners like the Aspen Global Change Institute, ACES, and the Colorado Natural Heritage Program. These studies are measuring the effects of climate change in high alpine ecosystems and will be critical for informing decisions by public lands managers like the US Forest Service in the years to come. Emily's work will also be incorporated into her 600-hour Master's Degree project at Western Colorado University, in which she hopes to design citizen science programs for the Gunnison National Forest.

For all her understanding of ecology and biology, Emily's focus is on the public. The more that people understand, the likelier it is that they will become stakeholders in protecting the natural world. And how to educate people about the studies being done? Emily hopes to engage people in her work by encouraging them to contribute their observations, thereby expanding the database. At the same time, the public's input will help inform upcoming land-use policies.



And ... while she's up there, she'll be keeping an eye out for the area's resident lynx. So you may hear more about big cats next fall.

She's no stranger to the outdoors. Emily has spent a huge portion of her life outside, driven by her passion for nature. As an undergraduate at the University of Montana, she took a minor in Wilderness Studies. Her B.A. in Journalism and her love of plants dictated that she should head for the woods as often as possible. She generated content for the Outdoor Women's Alliance, whose mission is to

inspire confidence and leadership in women. For five summers she worked as a hiking and rafting guide in Glacier National Park, and for two seasons she led cat-skiing forays in Montana's Whitefish Range.

As if those activities weren't enough, Emily helped organize vegetation management projects, reported on the spruce beetle epidemic in Colorado, earned her certificate in Level 1 avalanche education, and worked as a trainer for Leave No Trace.

All this by the age of twenty-seven.

So what's next?

Keep an eye out for her up on our beloved Pass this summer. IPF is fortunate to have Emily as an "ambassador," one who happily engages with people and takes all questions seriously. She might even ask you a few of her own. 🍷

Meet IPF's new co-president, Emily Jack-Scott

By Gail Holstein

WE'D LIKE YOU TO MEET Emily Jack-Scott. In addition to being the Program Director at the Aspen Global Change Institute, she became IPF's new Co-President, with Debbi Falender, this year. And she is a dynamo.

Emily brings to IPF a wealth of experience on issues involving trees and native ecosystems. After pursuing Environmental Studies as an undergraduate, she took her first job in urban forestry for the city of Philadelphia. That old and once crumbling town has, in recent years, enjoyed the new life that has been breathed into it by an army of tree planters – a project that was right up Emily's alley. As a young and idealistic woman, she was thrilled to coordinate the efforts of hundreds of volunteers to make that happen.

She went on to Yale's graduate school to earn a Master's Degree in Forest Studies. Her attraction to native ecosystems led her to wander the woods in several states around the U.S., working and learning. She says she had a lot of "great mentors" along the way who encouraged her interest. Eventually, in 2012, she fell in love with Colorado and decided to put down roots here.

Emily lives in Newcastle. Her husband is Dan Nielsen, who works with the Bureau of Land Management in the Rifle Fire District. Emily and Dan welcomed their first child, Bennett, a year and a half ago. Two



dogs and five chickens add spice to the couple's life – as if it needed more spice.

Joining IPF's board four years ago, Emily discovered yet another area in which her passion could flourish. She is mindful of the gifts that board members – some of whom have been around for many years – have brought to the organization. She is also willing and ready, with her perspective and ability for data analysis, to help grow IPF's knowledge base.

The Independence Pass Foundation celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. That's 30 years of care, study, and stewardship by two generations of volunteers. As a downvalley resident, Emily is eager to expand the perspective of people who don't live right here but who nevertheless use and love the land to the east of Aspen. She believes that, as the world gets

"smaller" each day, the intersection of people and nature becomes more vital and fragile; it's up to us to protect that junction.

Emily divides her time between her work at the Aspen Global Change Institute in Basalt, the Independence Pass Foundation, and her home life. "Home life" involves getting Bennett to and from day care, cooking, baking, feeding the chickens, paying attention to whatever needs doing, and – one assumes – collapsing into bed at night.

We're glad to have her on our board. 🍷

WEDNESDAY MORNING PASS PROJECTS



July 10 | July 31 | August 21

COME JOIN the Independence Pass Foundation board & staff for a morning of clearing trails, pulling weeds, planting trees, or whatever our favorite backyard needs most on that particular Wednesday!

Meet at the winter gate at 8am for coffee and pastries. We'll head up the road promptly at 8:30am to our work site, where we'll finish by noon.

IPF will provide breakfast, water and energy bars for the work session, all tools, and safety vests. Please bring work gloves and whatever else you'll need to work comfortably for several hours at high elevation in potentially a variety of weather.

One week prior to each date listed above we will post the location and a description of the project on our website at www.independencepass.org/volunteer-opportunities. We look forward to working with you!



Whacking weeds on Independence Pass

The Grottos tell a story of how rock and ice created the landscape of Independence Pass. The rocks beneath your feet are among the oldest in Colorado! Called GNEISS (pronounced "nice"), these rocks were formed deep within the earth's crust 1.7 billion years ago by the metamorphism of marine-deposited rocks. 300 million years later, underground pressure and heat pushed molten GRANITE up through the older GNEISS. Moving glaciers are powerful. They scoured and sculpted the rocks over time. Glaciers are great masses of ice that advance during cold periods and retreat when the climate warms. They created the topography we see today.

ERRATICS
These rock boulders are called ERRATICS. They are resting on a glacially smoothed and grooved level of GRANITE rock, called a WALLEBACK. The boulders were transported and deposited 10,000 years ago by one of the most recent glaciers. When temperatures warmed and ice melted, trapped boulders dropped into irregular places, like here. The grooves on the WALLEBACK rock were made by abrasion, when small particles of rock carried by the glacial scoured grooves on the bedrock.

GROTTOSS
Erosional forces at the base of the glacier started an incision in the bedrock. As the glacier melted, particle-carrying water slowly scoured a slot canyon, creating the grotto. In the past, ice perched year-round in the cold snow-warehouses, and the flow used the GROTTOSS for food storage and shelter. Today's warming temperatures are changing these conditions.

CASCADES
GLACIERS are formed during periods of cold temperatures, when large accumulations of snow freeze and become ice. The pressure of the ice causes the bottom part of the glacier to melt and then move. The glacier carries a variety of solid particles, from tiny grains of powdered rock to chunks of rock that have broken off in the freeze-thaw cycle. Today the Roaring Fork River churning through the CASCADES continues the erosion process. Below and transported sediments carve the granitic bedrock much like they sculpted the GROTTOSS thousands of years ago.

TRAIL MAP
Along your walk, you will see the typically GRANITE rocks. There are many examples of the rugged GNEISS just west of this sign and throughout Independence Pass.

Learn more at independencepass.org

Check out our new interpretive sign at The Grottos.

The sign is designed to deepen the visitor's understanding of the Grottos' fascinating geologic features and how glaciers shaped the landscape of Independence Pass. It also provides a much-needed trail map.

To our generous donors — thank you one and all!

In loving memory
Diana Beuttas
1925-2019



Who loved Independence Pass and was a loyal supporter of the Independence Pass Foundation. Diana will be missed, but her spirit lives on in the wind and water and wildflowers of the Pass.

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Skiing Blue aka Twining Peak, June 5, 2019

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

