



# Observations from the Mendenhall Glacier

Closeup view of the terminus of Mendenhall Glacier taken February 28, 2009

March 12, 2009

## Upcoming ... Fireside lectures

Friday, March 13 \* 6:30pm & 8pm  
**On Your Knees Cave and  
the Shuka Kaa Honor  
Ceremony**

See article at right for details.

Friday, March 20 \* 6:30pm & 8pm  
**Singer in the Stream:**

### American Dippers in Juneau

Our only aquatic songbird, the American Dipper nests on streamside cliffs and forages for stream insects and small fish. Get an inside look at the lives of local dippers through photos and stories with Mary Willson and Kathy Hocker. Learn the results of a five-year study of Juneau's dippers including details about their nesting biology and survival and the factors that limit the local population.

Booksigning Friday, March 20 at 5:30pm for **SINGER IN THE STREAM**

\*\* Thursday, March 26 at 7pm \*\*  
**Exxon Valdez Oil Spill:  
20 Years Later**

Auke Bay Lab scientist Jeep Rice presents an update on the effects of Alaska's worst oil spill. In 1989, the Exxon Valdez went aground on Bligh Reef in Prince William Sound.

Friday, March 27 \* 6:30pm and 8pm  
**The Glacier Wolf: Tales  
from Southeast Alaska**

Listen to writer/photographer Nick Jans read from his soon-to-be-released collection of Southeast Alaska essays. Enjoy a slide show of the wildlife and landscapes that inspired this latest book, his ninth.

More at [www.mendenhallglacier.org](http://www.mendenhallglacier.org)

Fireside lectures are free and occur on Friday nights in January, February and March.

## On Your Knees Cave and the Shuka Kaa Honor Ceremony

Explore one of Alaska's most fascinating archaeological discoveries with Tongass National Forest archaeologist Terry Fifield on March 13 at 6:30pm and repeat at 8pm.

This week's Fireside lecture and slideshow reveals how Forest Service staff, researchers, and Tribes have worked together in the study and ultimate reburial of 10,300 year-old human remains.

Terry has been with the project since its beginnings in 1994. He will explore the project's history and discuss its many scientific, social, and political outcomes.

The repatriation and reburial of the remains were coordinated with the tribal governments by Fifield and Tribal Relations Program Manager John Autrey. Their working relationship with the tribal governments and leaders of the Prince of Wales tribes was a key factor in the remains being identified through DNA testing, and their being repatriated in 2007 under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA).



Archaeologist Terry Fifield at the entrance to On Your Knees Cave

*This bentwood burial box holds the remains of a man who lived 10,300 years ago on Prince of Wales Island. The human remains were discovered in 1994 in On Your Knees Cave.*

*The box was designed and built by Klawock Master Carver Jon Rowan, Jr. The red cedar liner was woven by Debbie Head of Craig.*

*This box and its special contents were buried in an honor ceremony in September, 2008. The design is an eagle and a raven forming a cave which contains a man.*



**Heavy snowfall makes challenging work for Juneau's mail carriers as roadside mailboxes get buried in the snow**



## **Naturalist's Notebook**

### **Some additional lecture opportunities:**

#### **Thursday March 12 at 7pm UAS**

The city's arboretum will be featured at this month's Juneau Audubon Society meeting on tonight at 7pm. Arboretum Manager Merrill Jensen will share photos, stories and the history of the Jensen-Olson Arboretum since it was homesteaded by the Peterson family in 1902. The meeting will be held at the UAS Egan room 221/222 at 7:00 pm. This is a chance to learn more about Caroline Jensen's gift to the people of Juneau.

#### **Wednesday, March 18 at 7pm at Centennial Hall:**

Dr. Matt Heavner, University of Alaska Southeast environmental sciences professor, will be the featured speaker on Wednesday, March 18 at 7pm at Centennial Hall for the Science in Alaska series of lectures sponsored by the University of Alaska. His topic is SEAMONSTER: The Glacier in Your Backyard. Matt works closely with the visitor center, providing essential information that we share with visitors on glacial phenomena. Matt and his colleagues presented a Fireside talk about the changes to Mendenhall earlier this year.

#### **Thursday, March 26 at 7pm at the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center**

Exxon Valdez Oil Spill 20 Years Later lecture and slideshow by NOAA's Jeep Rice. More details coming soon.

I drive to work this morning following a road grader with a 12-foot wide blade as it scrapes snow from the Back Loop Road. Rather than be frustrated at the delay, I am fascinated to watch the skillful operator maneuver the blade to remove the morning's accumulation across 1-1/2 traffic lanes to the side of the road. Heavy snow is falling and I am hoping to get one more ski run before the snow turns to rain later this afternoon. Indeed, as I start out on the campground trail, snow sticks to the base of my skis. A sharp kick dislodges the packed snow. It takes work to ski the circuit but that's one of the reasons I'm skiing.

No matter how cold or snowy there are always birds at the entrance to the campground. Today a large flock of flitting chestnut-backed chickadees are chirping. A raven clucks. Steller's jays and magpies scream.

Despite the continuing snow, birds are becoming active. Wednesday there were three short-eared owls cruising the Mendenhall Refuge as the tide was falling. There are big tides now — 17.8 feet at about 3pm Thursday and 16.8 at about 3:30pm on Friday. The tide floods the refuge and melts the snow giving geese, ducks and other birds a place to feed and stand on grassy areas. The high tide probably also flooded out the wetlands-dwelling vole population which attracted the diurnal short-eared owls. These slow-flying handsome tawny and white owls are

migratory visitors to Juneau. Their appearance is a sure sign of spring coming soon. Maybe.

I saw an eagle carrying nesting material last week as it flew above the highway near Auke Bay. The eagle clutched a long cottonwood branch in its talons. I was distracted at first and did not recognize the eagle's cargo. Instead, I was listening to the awful clunking as one of those dirty wheel-well icebergs flipped around my rear tire. The term "erratic" perfectly describes those black ice chunks that litter roads and parking lots. Formed when wet road dirt sprays into vehicle wheel-wells the mush then freezes into a block of oddly shaped ice. The ice remains wedged into the tight space until motion and gravity releases it. An erratic in glaciological lingo means a rock that doesn't fit in with the rest of the landscape. Those black ice chunks look like rocks in snowy parking spaces.

Returning to birds: I was talking to a friend on the phone yesterday when she halted in mid-sentence to tell me about the beautiful yellow feathers on the pine siskins hovering at the bird feeder outside her window. At the same moment a little bird came poking at the 2-foot long icicle dangling from the roof outside my own window. She said this is a tough time for the birds: they are ready for spring but the ground and trees are still covered with snow. At the glacier the siskins and redpolls are feeding on the seeds of Sitka alders.

*Observations from Mendenhall Glacier*  
and *Naturalist's Notebook*  
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US Forest Service  
8510 Mendenhall Loop Road  
Juneau, AK 99801 907.789.0097

Winter Hours Thursday-Sunday  
10am to 4pm Free in winter



People play near the top of the snowpile in the glacier's bus parking lot on March 1, 2009. This snow has been removed from neighborhoods and deposited on here to reduce the winter's heavy accumulation and to improve safety on residential streets.

## Clever spoof capitalizes on glacier snow pile

This winter's snowfall is piled up eight feet high in some places on the Glacier Spur Road.

In the visitor center's bus parking lot, the mountain of snow is higher than in record-breaking 2006-2007 when the town's official accumulation reached 197 inches at the airport. That summer the lot's snowpile never completely melted before autumn snow began to fall.

The bus lot snow is a site where the City and Borough of Juneau's snow removal contractor can relocate snow accumulations that clog valley streets and create unsafe conditions in residential areas.

Last week a spoof sign appeared near the gate to the lot. (See right.) Despite Forest Service and city logos, the sign is not an official publication of either entity.

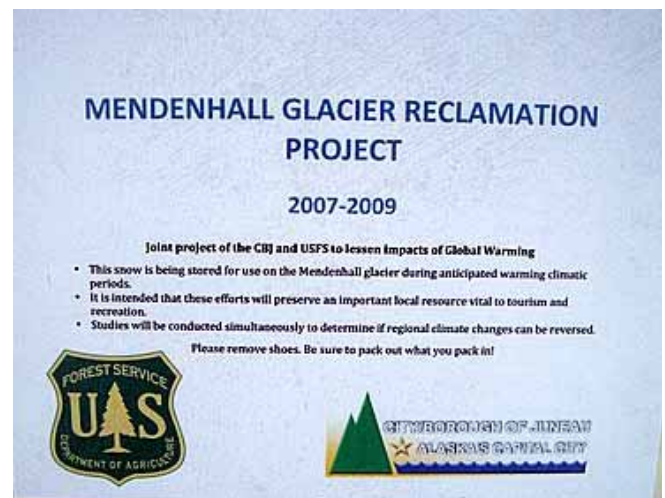
Snow this winter is building up and not melting due to very cold temperatures. Although official measurements are taken at the airport, located four miles away from the glacier, more snow falls closer to the ice.

The National Weather Service records statistics at its Back Loop Road facility adjacent to the US Forest Service's Juneau Ranger District office and a mile from the visitor center. Measurements there more closely mirror conditions at the glacier.

As of Thursday morning, March 12, the "valley" snow fall is 173.1 inches. The official airport tally is 162.2 inches, according to Juneau's National Weather Service forecaster Rick Fritsch.

### "Valley" snowfall stats

October 08	6.3"
November 08	6.4"
December 08	25.9"
January 09	78.4"
February 09	38.7"
*12 March 09	17.4"



This is a photo of a joke sign placed anonymously near the giant snowpile in the glacier's bus parking lot. Below is the text of the sign. Photo courtesy of Sylvia Bach.

