

From the Land of Nessie, The Scots invade, hard-working Scots

by Dave Kenagy

Every year, for the last dozen years, we've had a Student Conservation Association trail crew to work on Refuge trails for a month or two during the summer. These crews consist of two supervisors and eight high school students from around the country. They have always done excellent trail work, rehabilitating existing trails and building new ones. This year, due to a smaller Refuge budget, they were cut.

Our seasonal backcountry trail crew is also smaller than last year, but we feel fortunate to have a very capable small crew, with Jason Young, Tim Kirby, and Josh Plate doing the work. Early in the summer backcountry ranger, Scott Slavik, and crew-leader Young planned and completed a number of excellent trail projects. However, there are always projects that are more easily completed with more hands. That's where the SCA trail crews normally fit in.

Gary Titus, our Refuge cabin manager also had a small seasonal crew, with Iven Sjodin and Bryan Taylor handling maintenance of all Refuge public use and historic cabins. Gary, like Scott, always has a few cabin maintenance projects that are best accomplished with a larger crew.

Sometimes, when you least expect it, fortune lands right on your doorstep. It did this year. In late spring, our regional volunteer coordinator, Maeve Taylor, called me on the phone asked if we could use a volunteer crew from, of all places, Scotland.

A group of high school students, from the town of Banchory, wanted to volunteer for trail work or any other projects we might have on the Refuge. Banchory, pronounced "Bankoree," is a little more than 100 miles from Loch Ness, home of the famous Loch Ness Monster.

The students held fund-raisers during the school year to pay for a summer trip to Alaska, which was directed through "Freewill Pursuits," an organization similar to America's "Outward Bound."

I discussed the possibilities with Scott and Gary, and we came up with a few tentative projects. I called Maeve back, and the wheels were set in motion. We would have a crew of 12 students and two crew lead-

ers in mid-July.

As the summer progressed, Scott and Gary mulled-over various work projects, and finally settled on a Bear Creek Trail rehabilitation project and a Moose Creek Cabin project, both on the north shore of Tustumena Lake, in the heart of brown bear country. Half the crew would work with Gary's crew, half with Scott's crew.

When our Scottish work crew arrived, they were motored across Tustumena Lake to the worksites. Scott and Gary gave them the usual work safety and bear safety training talks, and put them to work.

Bear Creek Trail had a long boggy section that needed stabilization. The crew cleaned the trail of debris and built a multi-layered "turnpike" with logs and gravel. The work was hard, with lots of bugs, but the Scots did it all with good cheer. They also did clearing work on the Lake Emma Trail, and did a fine job there, too.

The historic Moose Creek Cabin (sauna) needed 9 logs replaced to restore it to good condition. Gary supervised raising of the structure, and the careful notching and placing of new logs. The Scottish volunteers took their work seriously, and were beaming with pride when they had completed their tasks.

Bears? Yes, they did see bears—lots of them. They saw bears on the trails, bears in the salmon streams, bears by the shoreline. But, they practiced good bear-country etiquette, and never had a single problem.

They also practiced good work habits, and never had a single injury.

Scott and Gary were very pleased with our Scottish volunteers—all were polite, hard-working, and always had smiles on their faces. The work they did was first-rate.

As always, all the workers did their work for you, the people of our great country. Because of their hard work, the Refuge is a better place to visit. Your trails are easier to hike, and your historic structures preserved. I say hats off to all who worked on these projects—for a job well-done.

Dave Kenagy is the volunteer coordinator for the

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, who would like to note that Loch Ness (Lake Ness) and Tustumena Lake have much in common; both are 23 miles long, near the sea, and glacially-carved. So, did the Scottish lads and lassies

see the Tustumena Loch Monster? Unfortunately, no. If you have, let Dave know. He's eagerly awaiting your call. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.