

## ***North for Science! 2025*** **Trip Report**

*North for Science! 2025* was remarkable. Despite a cold wet arctic storm that delayed our departure a day, ten intrepid Interior Alaska middle school students from diverse backgrounds spent seven days camping and learning together along the Dalton Highway in the Brooks Range June 7-13, 2025.

As the road to the Galbraith Lake Campground was blocked by an impassable snowdrift, we spent all six nights at Marion Creek campground on the south slopes of the Brooks Range. Despite a largely sunny drive north, the weather forecast proved accurate, and we set up camp in the rain. Not a complaint was heard and the group had immediate practice in staying warm and dry as it rained all night.

Rain gear and rubber boots served us well as we headed to the Arctic

Interagency Visitors Center (AIVC) for our bear awareness training and deterrent practice with BLM's Steve Taylor, who was one of the trip leaders. The AIVC provided materials and space for additional hands-on activities that included owl pellet dissection led by AIVC intern Carlos Ramos, and gold panning instruction provided by Steve Taylor. One highlight



of the AIVC activities included the collection of "vegetation plugs" that will stay on display in the Visitors Center all season - BLM's Kerri Hamos and Alaska Songbird Institute (ASI)'s North for Science coordinator Carol Scott assisted with this effort.

Under unexpectedly blue skies that continued for the rest of the trip, we hiked to Marion Creek Falls, along the way installing a trails challenge sign and learning about managing human impact on vegetation by helping to move materials for future boardwalk construction. We

gathered data on a boreal forest transect, in the hopes we would be repeating the transect on the tundra. Alas, time and snowpack precluded the tundra transect comparison, but our time at Toolik Field Station reinforced our learning about tundra vegetation.



Thanks to Erik Schoen of UAF we met up with a multi-disciplinary EvoME (Evolving Meta-Ecosystems) research team at Grayling Lake. In addition to Erik, researchers from Alabama and Connecticut provided the group with some hands-on examination of terrestrial and aquatic insects, along with a demonstration of how to get graying to regurgitate their stomach contents. We also sharpened our skull identification skills with Brain Perry, BLM manager of the AIVC.

This preceded an evening program on tussocks by Toolik researcher Marcel Vaz and artist-in-residence Kristin Link.

Kaiti Ott (also a trip leader) provided insight into the use of radio collars and telemetry equipment for studying populations of wild animals, while ASI's Nick Taubenheim (our 4<sup>th</sup> trip leader) led the group on a bird identification walk around camp. As in previous years, we conducted snowshoe hare pellet counts for BLM ecologist Anna O'Malley on our

designated "North for Science" site on the Hammond River. On our way back to camp we stopped for a brief tour of the community of Wiseman to gain insight into the local mining history and a different perspective of living in the Brooks Range... and a game or two of ping-pong, thanks to our hosts Berni and Uta Hicker.



A day trip to the north side of the Brooks Range took us to Toolik Field Station, where we spent much of the day learning from staff and researchers there about many ongoing Arctic research projects. We'd brought our camp kitchen along so were able to spend the evening eating, fossil hunting, and playing in the Galbraith Lake area. Those impassable snowdrifts provided ample ammunition for an awesome all-hands-on-deck snowball fight before we headed back south over Atigun Pass for our final night of camping at Marion Creek.

Throughout this fun-and-learning filled week team members were constantly active and engaged, enthusiastically soaking up every new experience and enjoying living outdoors regardless of weather conditions - with a new group of friends, all in awesome surroundings.

To describe the overall experience, participants wrote:



“I believe that the value of North for Science lies in the fact that smart, capable, and friendly adults are willing to spend so much time educating and inspiring a love of nature in kids.”

“The program was great for exploring different areas of science. We did multiple different things I didn’t know existed ...”

“...I like the no electronics rule because it brings people together!”

“... North for Science is a fun camp to make new friends, and to get out of your comfort zone. No matter the weather, we will ALWAYS have fun.”

“I think that North for Science can teach valuable information, as well as give kids the motivation and reason to get outside whether it’s for a short hike or a weeklong camping trip.”

