



Murie Ranch

RESOURCE BRIEF

Importance

The Murie Ranch was originally homesteaded by Buster Estes. After he found his land unsuitable for the cultivation of crops, he and his Philadelphia socialite wife, Frances Mears, established the successful STS Dude Ranch on the property. When dude ranching declined Estes sold to the Muries in 1945. The Murie Ranch provided a home for renowned wildlife biologists Olaus and Adolph Murie and their families. The brothers both pioneered ground-breaking studies that changed how scientists looked at ecosystems, especially predator-prey relationships. Advocating that the natural processes they studied be allowed to persist without human manipulation put the Muries on the forefront of the conservation movement. Married to sisters— Olaus to Margaret (Mardy) and Adolph to Louise— the close-knit Muries enthusiastically shared their love of the land and their passion for wild places. After retiring from government service, much of which he spent studying elk in Jackson Hole, Olaus accepted co-directorship of the Wilderness Society with the understanding that he could run the society from the ranch. Meetings there led to legislation creating the Wilderness Act and protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The Murie Ranch grew from a meeting place to an inspirational touchstone for environmentalists.



MURIE CENTER ARCHIVES

Olaus and Mardy Murie's log home.

became an outstanding early leader of the conservation movement. The National Park Service bought the ranch from the Muries in 1966, allowing Mardy to live there until her death in 2003. In recognition of the inspiration of the Muries and their land, the ranch was listed on the National Register of Historical Places in 1998 and designated a National Historic Landmark in 2006. One of the challenges in preserving the ranch is to restore the buildings without changing their historical integrity. That has been accomplished by using historical restoration experts and volunteer groups who work to strengthen the structures using traditional techniques. In 2009, researchers completed an inventory of landscape features important to the ranch. The Murie Ranch buildings will continue to need regular preservation maintenance.

Status

After the death of Olaus in 1963, Mardy propelled the cause of protecting wilderness forward with her own tireless efforts. She traveled to Alaska to survey potential wilderness; wrote books, articles, and letters; testified before congress; and was witness to several presidential signings of landmark wilderness legislation. She



MURIE CENTER ARCHIVES

Brothers Olaus and Adolph Murie.

Discussion

The Murie Ranch became a place of inspiration for researchers, writers, political leaders and budding advocates of wildness and wilderness during the Muries' tenure there. To make the ranch more accessible to park visitors while keeping its rustic nature, a self-guided pathway from the nearby Craig Thomas Discovery Center will open the summer of 2010. Providing programs to further wildlife and wilderness conservation is the goal of the Murie Center, the non-profit organization that operates the ranch in partnership with Grand Teton National Park. Under NPS guidance, their active stewardship on the ranch will help maintain and protect the structures so the connection with the history of the Muries will remain tangible for years to come.