

PREPPING THE TRAPLINE

BY JUDY FERGUSON

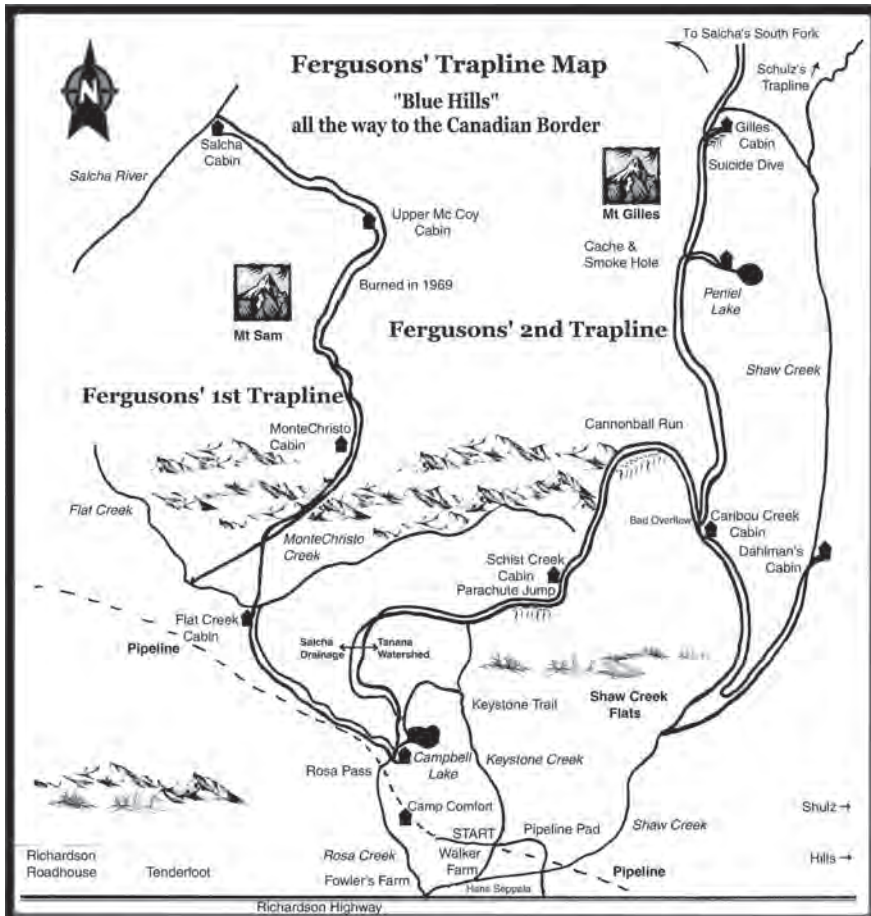
In the fall of 1974 my husband, Reb, 4-year-old son, Clint, and I walked to our first trap cabin, Campbell's, to cut firewood for the winter season. The guys stacked firewood while I scooped frozen cranberries with a bear claw.

In 1969, a fire had burned the marten habitat for thousands of acres. Grieved, we had to abandon our Montechristo line, and build up a new trapline. Longtime friend, trapper and big game guide Charlie Boyd had warned us that the marten would perhaps not return in our lifetime. As the three of us hiked into Campbell's, a light dusting of snow had fallen; it seemed

like an ideal opportunity to walk our old trapline and look for marten tracks. On a whim, Reb and I asked Clint if he could walk that far. He said he could. Over dinner at Campbell's, we excitedly made plans to hike to our next cabin at Flat Creek [on the "new" maps listed as McCoy Creek] and then, on to Montechristo, where we had not been in five years. We hoped that Charlie might be



Gold rush era prospector and trapper Fred Campbell whose trapline the Reb Ferguson family purchased in 1966 and has trapped ever since.



Map of the Reb Ferguson family's two traplines. Copyright Judy Ferguson, 2003.

wrong, that there might be animal sign. The next day on our way to Flat, we passed chickadees fluttering on the snowy ridge. As we began the steep descent into the broad Flat Creek drainage, spruce hens flushed to the treetops. On our return trip, we wanted to pick up a grouse for Thanksgiving. By candlelight that night at Flat Creek, the late trapper and prospector Fred Campbell's second trap cabin, I chinked the front wall with rags. Reb bedded down on the dirt floor and left the single bunk for Clint and me.

The next day we hiked across miles of

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muskeg, scanning the snow for tracks of a loping marten. Thick, falling snow began to obscure Reb's trail ahead of me. Little Clint's legs did not move quickly, and we worried about the snow deepening and the difficulty of getting Clint back on his own steam. Deflated blueberries hung on the brush; trying to entice Clint to keep going, we took time to eat them as we walked. We drifted along, telling stories of Pinocchio's Blue Fairy, as I recited every detail of Geppetto and his wooden puppet. Hours trickled by before we came to the burned area where we began to lose the trail in the confusion of charred trees. We paused while Reb warmed us with a campfire and we ate some cold, leftover pancakes. Then, Clint happily followed his dad up valleys that branched from one into another. The brush gave way to birch, and we entered the narrow, unscathed valley of Montechristo Creek.

After nine and a half hours of walking, our cabin reached out to us like an old friend nestled on its mountain shelf next to a gurgling creek. The last time we had been here was two months before Clint was born. Now, we could show the cabin to our son. Reb hauled water from the creek and heated it on the barrel stove. Finding a large enamel cup, he offered

Clint, "a man-sized cup of cocoa suitable for a man's walk." Clint snuggled up to his dad on the dried grass mattress and pole bed. After dinner just before bed, I looked through the cabin's open door and studied the stars and Montechristo's familiar ridges. I thanked God

we were home again, shut the door and turned out the lantern.

As we walked back home the following day, it seemed that Charlie was right because we saw no marten tracks as we pushed through 18 inches of snow. Along the way, I picked up a No. 1 trap of Fred Campbell's, hanging on a collapsed cabin wall, and showed

it to Clint at the Flat Creek cabin. After dinner, and sitting in dried long johns, Reb showed Clint how to set the sensitive pan of the trap without catching his little fingers.

On the way back to Campbell's, we heard the whirr of wings. Reb had the .22 ready and bagged the wild chicken. At the lake cabin, I got my frozen cranberries and packed them over the mountain for home, ready to garnish our grouse for Thanksgiving.

From *Blue Hills* by Judy Ferguson. Ferguson, a 47-year Big Delta resident, is the author of "Windows to the Land, An Alaska Native Story, Volume I: Alaska Native Land Claims Trailblazers," "Bridges to Statehood," "Parallel Destinies," "Blue Hills," and children's books "Alaska's Secret Door," "Alaska's Little Chief," and "Alaska's First People." Facebook: Voice of Alaska Press. All of Judy's books are now available as eBooks. <http://judysoutpost.com>



After 9.5 hours of walking in snowy muskeg, Clint gets a man's cup of cocoa, with father Reb Ferguson. Montechristo Creek, 1974. Judy Ferguson photo.



Clint and Reb Ferguson, prepping the trapline for trapping season, Montechristo, 1974. Judy Ferguson photo.