



Paula and John Anderson's fox farm and roadhouse, north end of Wonder Lake.

PAULA ANDERSON

In the mining days of the Kantishna area of Denali National Park and Preserve, the people who sought their fortune embodied the adventurous spirit of the early Euro-Americans who came to Alaska. These people made their mark on the history of the area through their strength and perseverance in pursuit of the riches of the land, and through their adaptability to the realities of living in the remote Kantishna area. Paula Anderson was one such person.

Paula "Polly" Liebau emigrated to the U.S. from Germany as a young woman, following the allure of gold to Alaska. Along with her prospecting partner and husband, John Anderson, Paula crossed the Alaska Range by dog team, arriving to mine in the Kantishna District in 1918. The Andersons each filed prospecting claims and met some success in their mining endeavors. In addition to mining as a livelihood, the Andersons settled at the north end of Wonder Lake and undertook a variety of frontier enterprises.



Paula greets an arriving visitor at her roadhouse. Wonder Lake and Alaska Range in background.

At "Polly's"

Miners and travelers found refuge at Paula's "Polly's" Roadhouse in their trips to Kantishna. There, visitors found a meal of local food, Paula's care-giving, and "a place to rest in the boonies." Paula cared for early park ranger, Grant Pearson, who spent a few days recuperating at her roadhouse after pulling his own infected tooth with a pair of her pliers. Visitors also encountered the Anderson's unique interior decorating. From chairs to bookshelves, their home was outfitted with abundant furnishings crafted from caribou antlers. This was notable to visitors, whose reviews ranged from that of fascination to complaint that the antlers made for pointy respite.

Entrepreneur

Paula wore many hats. In addition to ongoing mining endeavors, she and John trapped local fauna, raised foxes to produce furs for sale, and raised sled dogs to sell. The Anderson's produced or gathered nearly everything that they needed for survival. Paula operated her roadhouse as yet another source of revenue. She fed visitors trout from Wonder Lake, berries from the surrounding tundra, and vegetables from her garden.



John Anderson Collection, courtesy of Jay Hathaway.

Paula with a caribou antler chair and caribou hides.

Homesteading

As mining wound down in Kantishna, the Andersons found themselves with decreasing business. Despite filing for the official homestead rights to her property in 1926, the Andersons moved to California in 1929. In 1930, Paula received official patent to her 160 acres. By 1932, the expanded national park boundary encompassed her land, leading to an eventual change in ownership. Today, only the landscape at the north end of Wonder Lake remains as a reminder of Paula's fox farm and roadhouse.



John Anderson Collection, courtesy of Jay Hathaway.

Polly's roadhouse was filled with furniture and fixtures made of caribou antlers. Rugs, comforters, and seat cushions were made from caribou hides.

Below: Paula and John Anderson at Wonder Lake. The couple were meticulous observers of the natural world. They kept detailed weather and naturalist observations for many years and provided ornithological data to the U.S. Biological Survey.



John Anderson Collection, courtesy of Jay Hathaway.

Sources: Bryant, Jane. *Snapshots from the Past*, Denali National Park and Preserve Center for Resources, Science, 2011. • Pearson, Grant H. *My Life of High Adventure*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1962. • Mary Rhyne Oral History, DENA Collection, June 18, 2003. Denali National Park and Preserve Museum Collection. • Walker, Tom. *McKinley Station*, Pictorial Histories Publishing Co, Missoula, MT 2009.

For more information about Denali National Park and Preserve: <http://www.nps.gov/dena/historyculture/index.htm>