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# COOL SCIENCE



*Sarah R. Johnson, founder of Wild Rose Education, prepares to deploy an ice ball buoy from the North Slope Borough Search and Rescue Sikorsky S-92 helicopter along a 100-mile transect offshore of Utqiagvik, Alaska. The buoys collect environmental conditions data to be used for climate research around the world. Photo by Ignatius Rigor*

*By Kate Phillips  
Sopris Sun Correspondent*

Nearly 100 miles offshore, north of Utqiagvik, Alaska, Sarah R. Johnson, founder of Wild Rose Education in Carbondale, carefully leaned out of a hovering North Slope Borough Search and Rescue Sikorsky S-92 helicopter.

Pausing for just a moment to take in the vastness of the Arctic Ocean, Johnson exhaled as she released an ice ball buoy onto the sea ice below. Before she could catch her breath, the pilot, wary of polar bears, quickly departed leaving the buoy to drift for years to come.

“I have such a connection with place, and landscapes,” Johnson said. “I had never dreamed of going to the Arctic, but I love doing field science and I also love going on wilderness

adventures. This was an amazing opportunity to do both.”

From March 27 through April 8, Johnson, a prominent environmental education specialist, was a part of the International Arctic Buoy Programme’s (IABP) Spring 2022 deployment, serving as the team’s PolarTREC education officer.

Led by the University of Washington Polar Science Center and the Office of Naval Research International Cooperative Engagement Program for Polar Research, the IABP provides oceanographic and meteorological data for Arctic climate research. Johnson’s role included, but was not limited to, field assistance and expansion of the team’s outreach and academic programs.

On this expedition, the team deployed over a dozen buoys that will drift on sea ice for several years. According

to Johnson, the buoys support climate research by recording environmental variables such as time, location, air pressure and temperature. The data is open-source, meaning anyone can access it, but Johnson said it is mostly utilized by the World Meteorological Organization for weather forecasting, sea ice observation and NASA satellite imagery verification.

“Ultimately, this data has been cited by thousands of academic research journals because it is instrumental in helping us understand climate change,” she emphasized. “It is one of the longest, consistent records of the Arctic conditions.”

Johnson first connected with the IABP in December 2019, when she was accepted into the prestigious PolarTREC program. Funded by the National Science Foundation, PolarTREC “provides opportunities for educators to

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# Ute history returns to Redstone

By Dyana Z. Furmansky  
Sopris Sun Correspondent

Before they were marched out of Western Colorado in the 1880s, the Utes had spent some 10,000 summers in the Crystal River Valley, home to the Redstone Historical Society (RHS) since 2001. RHS invited C. J. Brafford, director of the Ute Indian Museum in Montrose, to talk about the present, as well as the past, of Colorado's longest continuing inhabitants, at the society's annual meeting on June 26.

"My presentation is to create cultural awareness, and to be mindful that the Utes, who call themselves Nuuchi — are still here," says Director Brafford, a member of the Oglala Lakota Sioux. By "here," Brafford does not mean Redstone; one Ute reservation is in Utah, and two are in southwest Colorado. The last home of Chief Ouray, who was part Ute, serves as a portion of the Ute Indian Museum, and the grave of Ouray's wife Chipeta is on the museum's grounds. RHS's program about the Utes is reportedly its first on the topic and is open to the public.

"I've been telling the Redstone Historical Society that the story of the Crystal River Valley didn't start with J.C. Osgood," the coal and steel magnate who

founded the company town of Redstone in 1889, says RHS Board Member Larry K. Meredith. "It's embarrassing that this will be the first time the society focuses on the Utes in our history," Meredith moved to Redstone five years ago from Gunnison. His lifetime affinity for Ute culture led him to write the novel "This Cursed Valley" about white miners who moved to the Valley following the Utes' forced removal, and a parting holy man's eternal damnation of the new arrivals and their enterprises.

Whether legend or not, the curse seems a response to Colorado Governor Fredrick Pitkin's repeated promises to "rid the state of the Ute menace." Emotions boiled over following the 1879 Ute uprising at the White River Indian Agency near present-day Meeker, which resulted in the killing of U.S. Major Thomas Thornburgh, 13 of his troops, Agency Head Nathan Meeker and 11 of Meeker's white, male associates. Utes also kidnapped Meeker's wife and daughter and held them for three weeks before returning them and other captives unharmed. Meeker had aroused the Utes' anger, in part, by forcing them to take up farming, which had never been part of their culture.

As nomads who traveled on foot and then by horse after Spanish



Ute Indian Museum Director C.J. Brafford, a Lakota, will give a presentation on the Ute at the Redstone Historical Society's June 26 annual meeting. Courtesy Photo

contact in the 1600s, the Utes left few made items in the places they lived. Depending on the season and the game they hunted, the Utes moved between higher and lower elevations. Many of their trails are still traveled, unknowingly, by contemporary residents of these valleys.

"The landscape of sacred Mother Earth tells their story, which the Utes believe will never end," says Brafford.

The annual meeting on June 26 will take place behind the Redstone Inn at 2 p.m. It is free to members of the society, and all interested individuals are invited. There will be a cash bar and other refreshments. Learn more at [historyredstone.org/ute-indian-presentation/](http://historyredstone.org/ute-indian-presentation/)

Cool Science... continued from cover

work in the field with cutting-edge scientists," Johnson said. The knowledge PolarTREC educators gain from these experiences is then shared in both formal and nonformal academic settings to further Arctic climate curiosity.

The original expedition was set to take place in March 2020, but the pandemic delayed it for two years. However, Johnson said, the delay helped her develop strong relationships with her colleagues and incorporate her extensive educational expertise to support the team's goals.

"I jumped in immediately to help them turn this whole STEM learning experience that they were in the middle of into [a virtual platform]," she said. "I worked with them for two years before ever traveling, and I was able to do a lot of cool stuff with them in that time."

According to Johnson, the collaboration between educators and scientists is critical for a thorough understanding of the Arctic's climate. "When we look at a humongous geographic region of the planet, we realize that there has to be so many different kinds of science and research teams that can all cross-pollinate and really learn from each other," she said. "Our work is truly integral to so many different research entities."

Johnson emphasized that, while her team's work is groundbreaking, they are not the first to be making these observations.

"The Indigenous people have been doing this forever, and we're just trying to get started," she said. "Sea ice affects everything. ... The Inuit people of the Arctic Circle are so dependent on sea ice. They actually have more freedom in the winter months than summer months because they rely on it for travel with their dog sleds. They are some of the most mobile people on the planet."

While Johnson's career is shifting toward a more global perspective, she will continue to design and facilitate climate change education workshops through Wild Rose Education. Her upcoming workshop, Summer Institute for Climate Change Education, will take place virtually July 18-22.

"It's incredible to be able to contribute to such a real project that influences the entire planet," she said. "It's not about me, it's about our whole planet."

To Learn more about Johnson's trip to the Arctic and Wild Rose Education, visit [www.wildroseeducation.com/arctic.html](http://www.wildroseeducation.com/arctic.html) where you can also find IABP and PolarTREC resources.

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