



Jon D. Iltis

March 5, 1955 - December 24, 2019

Jon D. Iltis, age 64, of Boulder Junction, WI passed peacefully December 24th, 2019, in the house that he built on the Manitowish River. Jon was born in Appleton, WI on March 5, 1955.

Jon graduated from High School in Neenah, Wisconsin in 1973. From then on, his life revolved around being outside, fostering others' love of the outdoors, and planning extended outdoor trips with his family and many friends. He attended the University of Colorado Boulder and graduated with a degree in Outdoor Recreation in 1980. Jon also attended courses at the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) in Lander, WY, and, using these skills and his extensive personal experience, played a pivotal role in establishing the Outpost Leadership Program at Camp Manito-wish, YMCA ("Camp"), in Boulder Junction.

Jon's impact at Camp Manito-wish was monumental. He first attended as a camper in 1968, and continued the connection for 45 years, spending a single year away. He led Camp's first Expeditionary Canuck - a 40 day unsupported canoe trip covering over 600 miles in the Northwest Territories of Canada and ending at Eskimo Point – in 1978. They had no satellite phones and saw no one along the way. One of his trip-mates recalls asking Jon how they would contact help in an emergency, to which Jon replied, "We'll just flag down the next plane". Jon had to admit that he had been hoping no one would notice when it was pointed out that they had not seen a plane in 20 days. Jon's gift was teaching self-reliance and preparedness in the outdoors and at the same

time helping others to appreciate the earth and to have fun recreating outdoors. Jon led other major trips including a second “Expo”, and thus was crucial in organizing and laying the groundwork for Camp’s long canoe trips in Canada as well as month-long Western backpacking trips, all of which helped secure Manito-wish’s legacy as one of the foremost outdoor tripping camps in the world.

Jon began as property manager of Camp in 1982. He married Sharon (Smith) Iltis in 1988. Together they raised their sons Nathan and Brian at Camp, living there for 25 yrs. With his intimate knowledge of how Camp functioned, Jon managed full-time staff and helped design and build most of the major buildings at camp, including the renovation of the historic Nash Lodge, which is used every year for the Community of Boulder Junction’s well-known Colorama Dinner. Jon and his family were some of the only people at Camp full-time during the winter months for many years. Jon began the first winter program from the office in his house, and designed and groomed the existing cross-country ski trails for the winter program.

Jon had an incredible network of friends, and was great at bringing people together. He combined his friends from college with his Camp friends and formed a dynamic group of outdoor adventurers that were his lifelong family friends. Camp alumni and visitors who attended winter events and supported the Camp year-round also became very close with the Iltis family. Above all, Jon loved his boys and spent many hours sharing the life he created for them on beautiful Boulder Lake, always challenging their outdoor skills with a supportive attitude.

Jon was very connected to the Boulder Junction community. He was a Boulder Junction volunteer fireman, a member of the Boulder Junction Lions Club, the Community Church, and volunteered for the food pantry and many other Boulder Junction Community events.

Jon’s spirit was nourished by walking through quiet woods, paddling on lakes and streams and exploring mountains. He held tight to his values for the good of the land. Those of us who got to join his journey were fortunate. He will be

missed however never forgotten.

Jon is preceded in death by his parents Charles and Betty (Kletzien) Iltis. He is survived by his two sons, Nathan and Brian Iltis, 28 and 25, Sharon, and siblings Charles "Skip" Iltis and Barbara Morley.

Condolences, photos, and other memories can be shared at Jon's page on the Bolger Funeral Home website: <https://www.bolgerfuneral.com/obituaries/Jon-Iltis/>. In lieu of flowers, please send memorials to Camp Manito-wish YMCA P.O. Box 246, Boulder Junction, WI 54512, and will be used for the Restoration of the Camp Manito-wish Historic Waterfront project. Checks can be made out to Camp Manito-wish YMCA.

Brian, Nathan, Sharon, and Jon's immediate family have spoken to many many friends interested in attending a public service, and have decided they are not comfortable with so many people they care about being driven to travel, gather closely, and inevitably embrace while the virus is still at large. They are going to hold an intimate family gathering across the river, at the cabin Jon built, share words and spread ashes together. Brian and Nathan are going to take some of Jon's remains back to Montana with them, where they can climb the Grand Teton together and let them drift away on the wind. Jon always dreamed of climbing that mountain with his kids, and told them so often. Plans to do a virtual service have been canceled. There may be another public service when times are less apocalyptic to offer everyone more closure, and we are still planning on working with Camp Manitowish to have a memorial event at Memorial Day Work Weekend 2021. We invite everyone to join us then, when we can share words, photos (Nathan has been scanning thousands of slides), memories, and help Camp kick off a great summer programming comeback! We have been loving the many posts we have seen on the Bolger Funeral Website tribute wall above, keep them coming! Please check back for updates once there's a vaccine. Much Love, The Iltis Family

There is a Northwoods Farewell to Jon Iltis at the Boulder Junction

Community Church at 11:00 AM on August 7, 2021.

Previous Events

Northwoods Farewell

AUG 7. 11:00 AM (CT)

Community Church of Boulder Junction
10445 Main St
Boulder Junction, WI 54512
<http://www.commchbj.org>

Tribute Wall

PK

“ Jon was a friend during my college years. For some reason he crossed my mind today so I searched his name hoping to say hello. Although it made me sad to hear he had left the earth I loved reading about his beautiful life Up North. I too am a a Boreal Forest soul. I am happy to know he lived life well. Love and greetings to his family

Patti Kryzanowski - August 22, 2024 at 02:08 PM

SS

“ My condolences go out to the Iltis family. I always enjoyed saying hello to Jon and having a chance to catch up with him whenever our paths would cross. He really cared about Camp and the people connected to it. I was sad to hear of his passing, and miss his Northwoods presence.

Stew Stone - June 26, 2020 at 10:42 AM

MA

“ A number of summers, Jon and Burr were running the Outpost and training us up for the trips. I remember Jon telling us stories about climbing Denali and getting caught in an avalanche. Valuable lessons on how to respond to a crisis with calm.



Mark - April 19, 2020 at 04:26 PM



“ 2 files added to the tribute wall



William Gibson - April 08, 2020 at 09:26 PM



“ *Jon was an inspirational soul who touched many of us. He had an infectious spirit that beckoned folks to leave their fears behind, try new things and just say YES to adventure. I first met Jon when he was trip leader on my Beartooth Mountain Range backpack trip. I was around 13 years old (around 1973?).*

Later in the late 70's as a program staffer at Manito-wish I would see Jon in camp between Canucks or during winter staff reunion parties. He was always quite the character with his plaid wool shirt, jaunty Stetson and cocked eyebrow(s). He could easily get a whole room of us laughing hysterically and rolling on the floor at a drop of the hat.

Jon's influence on me as a young man was a gift that set me on a good path and I will always be grateful to him for our friendship.

Bill Gibson



William Gibson - April 08, 2020 at 06:44 PM

AB

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Amy Boone - March 05, 2020 at 01:24 PM

AB

“ Here is a particularly memorable Thanksgiving in Red Lodge Montana circa 1977? Jon is in the upper right corner and I am under the guy who is lying sideways....



Amy Boone - March 05, 2020 at 10:31 AM

AB

“ I first met Jon in a biology class at the University of Colorado in the fall of 1975. I seem to recall that we were lab partners and we got to be pretty good buddies. He invited me to come on a winter camping trip in Yellowstone (a.k.a. “Jellystone”) in March 1976. I had only tried cross country skiing once and didn’t know how to downhill ski, but I agreed to go. We had to carry 60 pound packs on our backs and I’m sure I was the least experienced of the 12 or so other folks, many of whom were Jon’s old camp buddies and NOLS– instructor friends. After dozens of times falling down and having to hoist the heavy pack on my back, I was exhausted and exasperated! But somehow, at the end of that week of skiing, building a snow kitchen, soaking in the hot river and sharing a lot of laughter— I emerged a better skier with a lot more confidence than I had started with! I went on to share other adventures with Jon: snowshoeing, a five day raft trip on the Green River in Utah, camping in the desert... There were many trips in Ben, his old car with the plastic Jesus on the dashboard. For some reason, I always felt safe riding in that car (I attribute that more to my trust in Jon and not in the plastic Jesus). Jon’s love of the outdoors was contagious and I will always be grateful to him for sparking the love of nature and adventure in me that is a big part of who I am today.

Happy 65th birthday Jon! Thanks for all the memories and may you Rest In Peace! ❤️❤️

Amy Boone

Amy Boone - March 05, 2020 at 10:28 AM

SI

Hi Amy! Oh yes Benand 60 lb packs with the frame....face plant or turtle in the snow...amazingly fun...such adventure

sharon iltis - March 06, 2020 at 12:25 AM

LC

“ So glad we had a Boulder reunion a few years ago as Jon was there looking happy and well. Still remember him smiling as a few of us lunatics beat the heck out Pure Prairie Leagues' "AMY"! Rest in Peace Jon. Linda Crothers

Linda Crothers - January 20, 2020 at 08:15 AM

JA

“ Jon was one of the very active Lions in Boulder Junction. He volunteered at every one of the Lion's many functions, I had the privilege off getting to know him there, and a privilege it was. Jon was a kind and gentle soul always there for so many of us. My sadness goes out to his family and his sons whom he so loved. May he be skiiing and kayaking with such joy.
Joanne Ader

Joanne Ader - January 17, 2020 at 06:29 PM



“ Not a single person reading this could say they didn't learn something from Jon Iltis (me, especially).
The very first peak I climbed and repelled down was with Jon (the third Flatiron in Boulder, Colo 1978).
Automobile “ Ben” with the plastic dashboard Jesus took me up to Sugarloaf Mountain for the first time to a pink novelty of a house that contained Peter, Ted, and Teri.
The first time I skied by Pure Moonlight to a friend's Colorado cabin (where the snow was as high as the roof), Jon led the way.
The first time I carried a backpack that was bigger than me, Jon lifted it to my back. It was so large, in fact, that I could lean back when my arms were too tired of paddling and use it like a lazy boy to rest against.
On my first serious canoe trip, I learned to “ read the landscape “..... to find where the distant shoreline trees gradually narrowed to a “ V”, indicating this was the point where the waters would intersect and connect us to our next passage. I quickly learned to understand the waves and the water, to know the size and danger of the “ sleepers” (big rocks lying just below the surface that could tip our boat). I learned to paddle harder when the big voice from the stern shouted “ DIG”!!!
I learned how good a square of bittersweet Baker's chocolate could be for dessert. And that the only cracker that wouldn't crumble was a rye crisp.
The first time I stood motionless looking down a never ending road void of sound and structures, with no sign of humankind for hundreds of miles, Jon got us there... after at least seven hours of flat Saskatchewan horizon, we came upon an old farmer in denim overalls, resting inside his own wheelbarrow, in the middle of nowhere.
I learned the terms “ spooza “, “ gorp “, “ chew”, “portage”, “ Inuksuk”, “ On belay”. Jon taught me to be brave.
He also taught me how to pack, how to roll clothes and put things inside of things, to get the most use out of space.
The first time I wore food and contact lenses INSIDE my coat (to save from freezing), I was on a ski trip in Yellowstone in the dead of

winter. It was also the first time I used a shovel to make a kitchen and six chairs out of snow.

In January in Yellowstone, at 25 degrees below zero, I learned that the other five companions, who abandoned their tents and slept outdoors, fared far better than I Inside the tent, my breath would feed and build an entire ceiling of icicles.

I learned that XC skiing 200 miles in deep snow in an undershirt was much more thrilling than vacationing in the big timbered lodge at Old Faithful where fellow college students drank Cabernet from oversized glasses in front of roaring fires, staring into copies of “War and Peace”.

I learned how good a hot shower felt and food tasted that didn't have to be boiled.

I learned to wear two pair of ragg wool socks descending the steep Bear Tooth mountains of Montana to keep blisters from forming on the back of my heels.

Most of the tales I've told the past forty years that captivated the hearts and attention of the people around me, were adventures Jon set up - the ones that seemed scary, risky, impossible. The ones I remember-back on.....

*With humor and thanks, for being lucky enough to cross your path,
Sheila Decker*

Ps. Finally, Jon loved the North Woods, Camp Manito-wish , and all the friends who drove down the gravel road to visit him

Genevieve Decker - January 15, 2020 at 11:54 PM

SI

Hi Sheila, We are going through slides and photos and there are some of you, we would love to send to you....Could you email your address to Nathaniltis@gmail.com....thankyou so much for the wonderful tribute you wrote to Jon

Sharon Iltis - April 15, 2020 at 02:11 PM

BR

“ I was greatly saddened to hear of Jon's passing. I didn't know Jon well, yet he made a huge impact on me and the life that I currently lead. As a camper and staff member at Manito-wish from 1994-2005, Jon was a living legend. Yet that doesn't fully capture it. He was a constant at camp and one person that I knew, if I ever needed it, would be there. Sometimes knowing that someone is there is more important than anything else. I know that the best of Jon will be memorialized in every child and adult that is touched by the magic of camp. My greatest sympathies for this loss.

Britta - January 15, 2020 at 03:06 PM

BH

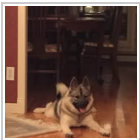
“ Beautifully written tribute. We'll be thinking of him this weekend as we head to Camp for MLK weekend.

Barbara Haig - January 13, 2020 at 09:12 PM

TK

“ A better bum and a fish there never was.

Tom Keating - January 05, 2020 at 05:02 PM



“ Our family has so many fond memories of Jon and our time together at Camp Manito-wish. He had a great sense of humor and was incredibly intelligent. He will be sorely missed.

Bob, Michelle, Jill, Ben and Kyle Van Howe

Michelle Storms - January 01, 2020 at 05:39 PM

RM

“ I grew up with Jon on Chatham Court in Neenah, WI and have many great memories of him. We spent a lot of time in his backyard swimming pool and playing all types of sports as kids. Jon was an exceptional athlete and outdoorsman. We were on a Little League team together and Jon struck out almost every batter he faced. Jon taught me much about being in the outdoors too. I remember a 4-day hike from Boulder to Granby, CO we did together in college that was amazing and something I would never have done on my own. I am sure Jon is hiking somewhere very nice now.

Rick Merrill

Rick Merrill - December 30, 2019 at 05:22 PM

KA

“ Jon's love of the outdoors, his fine sense of humor, and the joyful memories that my family shared with him will be what I will cherish.

My family is blessed to have spent so many joyful times with Jon. His spirit touched our lives and will not be forgotten.

Kathleen Eugster

Kathleen - December 28, 2019 at 10:31 AM

JP

“ Had a great time growing up with Jon on Chatham Ct in Neenah. Great athlete and Taught me about the outdoors. Wonderful sense of humor and just a fun guy to be around.

jim pabst - December 28, 2019 at 01:03 AM