HIGH MOUNTAIN INSTITUTE

where nature & minds meet

SPRING 2018

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS
CELEBRATE
20 YEARS
Every corner of this campus holds a story. Every bend in the canyons that we travel, every mountain that we climb—they hold HMI stories too. This year we are celebrating twenty years of HMI, and an untold number of stories.

Perhaps what is most powerful, however, is that these stories continue to take shape well beyond the places that hold them. The story of summiting a mountain becomes, years later, a story of remembering the capacity for fortitude in the face of challenge. The stories of expedition mishaps—like getting lost, or burning breakfast—become stories of finding humor, joy, and truth. And stories of friendship forged in the fire of adversity (blowing snow, seeking to understand opposing viewpoints) serve to remind us that through communication and collaboration, so much is possible.

The lessons embedded in these stories impact our alumni into adulthood, and inform how they find their way in the world. HMI helps students author lasting narratives of responsibility and self-discovery—we hope you will join us for the Reunion in June, and tell us all about it.

THROUGH OUR LENS THIS WINTER & SPRING:

TO FOLLOW MORE OF HMI’S ADVENTURES, FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA
WHAT’S INSIDE?
A CONSTANT OVER 20 YEARS OF GROWTH

By Danny O’Brien, Head of School

HMI turns 20 this year. Like many young adults hitting this milestone, I am as optimistic about our school’s future as they are about theirs. HMI’s applicant pool is strong, alumni and families loyal, faculty and staff superb, and offerings inspiring and relevant. We are entering our third decade a thriving institution.

Turning 20 is also a time to balance anticipation with reflection. Fred Rogers gave the commencement speech at my college graduation—when I was about the same age HMI is now. “For all the rest of your days and nights,” said Mr. Rogers, “I hope you can remember the outside things of life are not really the important things. It’s our insides that make us who we are, that allow us to dream and wonder and feel for others. That is what is essential. That is what will always make the biggest difference in the world.”

What are HMI’s insides? I recently found a twelve-year-old piece by Christopher Barnes, HMI’s co-founder. Who better than a founder to answer this question:

Ultimately, HMI grew from a certainty that the existence of such an educational opportunity was necessary—even essential—in today’s world. When we decided to make the junction of intellectual and outdoor pursuits our mission, we were forced to design a unique curriculum that focused on educating the whole person. Each year we matriculate students who have had an experience they could receive nowhere else in the world—and who have grown not only in their understanding of Precalculus, but also in their self-awareness and citizenship. We hope HMI will never be a “school with an outdoor program” nor a “wilderness program with academic classes;” there are plenty of such institutions in the world. Instead, HMI will always be uniquely located in the middle, at the crossing between two worlds: the place “Where Nature and Minds Meet.”

By wholly merging wilderness expeditions and intellectual pursuits, HMI provides an education in skills sorely lacking in today’s world: our students learn to collaborate; they learn to communicate and problem solve with people from different backgrounds and perspectives; and they build deep, affirming relationships instead of superficial, social media-driven ones. These are our insides, and why HMI is as important now as the day our doors opened.
COLLABORATION

A culture of competition too often dominates traditional high schools today. Everything is rank-ordered, from popularity to GPAs. I like to win, and believe that competition can be healthy. However, in my adult life, I rarely compete with others; I often find myself collaborating with them. The skills taught in many traditional high schools are not the ones students need for success in life. HMI expeditions promote the opposite. From the moment they wake up, students need to collaborate: from cooking meals to finding camp at the end of the day, they discover they cannot succeed by one-upping peers. Those who work together in the backcountry do the same on campus. As one student wrote in a weekly update last spring, “Here at HMI everyone seems to come together to try to solve (math) problems as a group. After we all finish worksheets, we come together to talk about the problems with which we had trouble.”

COMMUNICATION

In our country it has become acceptable to talk past one another—taking time to understand multiple perspectives and communicate thoughtfully about our own is not the norm. Yet, this is fundamental to problem solving and a better future. We are working to increase diversity in HMI’s population because the more backgrounds and viewpoints that are represented here, the more students learn to interact with people who are different from them. We teach communication and conflict resolution skills so students learn to confront challenges rather than run from them—which is a must for success in the backcountry, and life too. A recent alumnus wrote his college essay about all he discovered confronting problems can do for relationships. He discussed a peer who annoyed him on first expedition. “At first,” this student wrote, “I simply planned to ignore the person for the rest of the semester, which is what I would have done at home. HMI, however, taught me how to work through my problems with this person, and we ended up becoming best friends.”

TRUST AND AFFIRMING RELATIONSHIPS

Social media and technology often get in the way of teenagers developing meaningful connections. I am so glad students do not have access to their cell phones at HMI, and gladder still they have access instead to real conversations with one another and their teachers. At the end of a recent semester, a student told me that he felt good about math for the first time in his life. At home he would think of creative solutions to math problems, yet never shared them for fear that his peers would make fun of him—even though he had known these classmates since kindergarten. As a result, he struggled in math. This student went on to tell me about precalculus at HMI. He had been on an expedition with his teacher and a majority of the students in his class. Through those authentic, shared experiences, he came to trust his peers as he never had his classmates at home. The result? He leveraged the positive relationships he had with his peers to perform in the classroom—and he turned out to be a great math student.

None of this would be possible if we did not work so hard to integrate all parts of HMI into one whole. Doing this, in fact, is what makes HMI powerful. Our school may no longer be young, but HMI feels fresh and vibrant—the perfect place to be as we enter our next score of years and beyond.
DECEMBER 1994
Christopher and Molly Barnes have breakfast in Aspen, Colorado with Christopher's brother-in-law, Peter Neill. They talk about going back to graduate school and gaining more experience in independent schools in order to prepare themselves to start a semester program that combines high school academics and wilderness experiences. Peter encourages them to start the program now while they are young…

SEPTEMBER 1995
Christopher and Molly get married. Their wedding invitations include a card that reads: “In lieu of wedding gifts, please consider making a donation to the High Mountain Institute.”

SEPTEMBER 1998
21 courageous students arrive for the first semester to find a swinging piece of plywood for the front door and an unfinished boys’ cabin.

JANUARY 2003
The East Building is completed.

JUNE 2003
The Leading Edge, a summer leadership program, runs its first course.

AUGUST 2004
The Apprentice Program is formalized and the first Semester alumna (Jill Patterson, Semester 2) returns to be an apprentice.

JANUARY 2008
The first Semester alumna returns to be a faculty member. Rebecca Flint, Semester 7, is hired to teach French.

JUNE 2008
HMI celebrates its 10th anniversary; approximately 100 people attend the reunion weekend.
JUNE 2010

With the completion of the Campaign for Sustainability, Stuen Hall is constructed and dedicated in memory of Matthew Stuen, Semester 8. The West Building opens for use and has housing for apprentices, bathrooms for students, and an employee apartment.

MARCH 2011

HMI earns accreditation from the Association of Colorado Independent Schools. The Association of Experiential Education Accreditation Council also votes unanimously to re-accredit HMI for the extended accreditation period of 10 years. HMI is one of two organizations in AEE’s history to have no unmet standards in an accreditation site review.

MAY 2011

The name “Rocky Mountain Semester” is replaced by “HMI Semester” and the first Summer Term starts.

JUNE 2011

HMI purchases 40 acres adjacent to campus.

JUNE 2013

Over 360 alumni and friends attend HMI’s 15th reunion and celebration of Molly and Christopher Barnes. Molly and Christopher leave the institution they founded; the Main Building is renamed “The Barnes Building” in their honor.

AUGUST 2013

Danny O’Brien returns to HMI as Head of School after having served from 2004-2010 as a history teacher, Director of Admissions, and Acting Head of School.

DECEMBER 2015

HMI receives $500,000—the largest gift in school history—to begin constructing an on-campus Head of School home. The gift also starts a $4.5 million campaign to build additional on-campus faculty and staff housing.

SEPTEMBER 2015

HMI’s inaugural Gap Semester for recent high school graduates begins; students explore Colorado, Utah, and South America.

OCTOBER 2016

The Head of School home is completed, and Danny O’Brien and his family move onto campus.

DECEMBER 2016

40% of HMI alumni make a gift to HMI through the Summit Challenge, a milestone achievement.

APRIL 2017

Construction begins on two additional student cabins and a garage/workshop space.

JUNE 2017

The Educators Expedition, a professional development opportunity for teachers across the country, is in its first summer.

JULY 2017

HMI installs solar panels, which provide over 100% of the campus’s energy needs.

FEBRUARY 2018

The Board of Trustees approves HMI’s new diversity and inclusion statement.

JUNE 2018

HMI will celebrate two decades with a reunion in Leadville. Want to be a part of this monumental occasion?

REGISTER ONLINE AT WWW.HMINET.ORG/20-YEAR
The 20-Year Reunion will be a wonderful opportunity to celebrate a place that has given so much to so many. Come back to Leadville for a chance to reconnect with old friends and connect with members of the HMI community that you haven’t met yet. The weekend will include a bonfire, a film festival, live music and dancing, and plenty of adventure!

WE CAN’T WAIT TO SEE YOU IN JUNE!
REGISTER ONLINE AT WWW.HMINET.ORG/20-YEAR

ALUMNI OF COLOR RETREAT
JUNE 7 * LEADVILLE, CO

Join us for the inaugural Alumni of Color Retreat prior to the 20-Year Reunion to celebrate diversity and to connect with fellow alumni of color. This event will include networking and community-building opportunities and serve as a space to discuss diversity initiatives at HMI.

The Alumni of Color Retreat is open to all who identify as HMI alumni of color, including apprentice and former faculty. The Retreat is free for all members of the HMI community!

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND A LIST OF RETREAT LEADERS, PLEASE VISIT WWW.HMINET.ORG/ALUMNIOFCOLOR

We encourage you to reach out to Retreat leaders for more information, and to join our mailing list!
Why are you excited for the 20-year reunion?

Clark Estabrook Sulloway | Semester 24
I cannot wait to be back in the beautiful town of Leadville, meeting up with HMI alumni I both know and haven’t met yet, and getting back in touch with a part of this country and a part of my life experience I will never forget!

Leah Chubb | Semester 1
I am excited to be back with the people I was lucky enough to spend some formative time with and see grow and find success. It is hard for me to wrap my head around the fact that some alumni will have to wait 20 years until they get to reflect on their time at HMI in the same way we are. 20 years is a long time, but I am lucky to have close friends from my semester and increasingly grateful for the opportunity HMI gave me.

Nick Schine | Semester 37
Because I’ve been homesick for far too long.

Katie Overstrum | Summer Term 2017
I can’t make it to the reunion, but I know I’ll be back in Leadville one day because it’s been two years and I still can’t get my head out of the clouds.

Stokes Kandzari | Semester 36
Because HMI changed me in too many ways to count. It has allowed me to discover my dream college and have the opportunity to appreciate the beauty of the land around me like never before.

Matthew Hogan | Semester 20
I like that really big fire in the woods.

Read our alumni updates at www.hminet.org/alumniupdates
WHAT CONNECTS US?

By Barrett Donovan, Alumni & Development Coordinator, Semester 26 Alumna

In a 2000 newsletter article, Molly Barnes reflected: “Part of the overall HMI mission is to help students of all ages develop their own connections to the natural world. Some of the unwritten outcomes of the Rocky Mountain Semester in particular are the connections students make with each other and with the faculty and apprentices. I believe that these relationships are an essential part of maintaining one’s own connection to the RMS and of remembering some of the most valuable lessons. However, HMI does not have a Director of Alumni Relations….”
Twelve years after Molly wrote this, HMI hired its first Alumni Associate. In the fall of 2017 I returned to HMI and became the second person to hold this position. Like Molly, I’ve been thinking a lot about the concept of connection. What continuously draws people back to this place and this experience? When I think about my own time at HMI, I remember the early morning runs with friends, eating a hot meal outside of our freshly made quigloo, and late night sing-alongs in Cabin 5.

But it’s more than these memories that bind us. As teenagers, we spent a semester together in one of the most intentional places I can imagine. We learned how to learn, how to lead, how to be ourselves, to accept others as they are, and to love one another regardless of how cold or hungry or frustrated we may have been. We spent a pivotal time in our lives together, a time that informed how the majority of us approached the college process and beyond. I still love my semester no matter how far apart we have scattered, and know that no matter the distance or time that has passed, our shared experience at HMI will keep us intertwined.

As the Alumni Associate at HMI, it is my goal to help people remember and cultivate their connection with their semester and HMI, and who they grew into because of this place. While my semester feels like 100 years ago, I feel certain that I can and should continue to connect with my semester mates, and to remember the times at HMI that shaped us into who we are.

Today, our alumni community is stronger than ever. We consistently have high alumni participation rates in our annual giving campaign, host events for alumni across the map, and are approaching our 20-Year Reunion where alumni will return to HMI to reconnect with old friends, and meet members of our community that they haven’t yet crossed paths with.

In my role I am excited to continue working to bring the HMI community together, and to extend the magic and depth of this community beyond Leadville. If you too find yourself reminiscing about your time here, I urge you to reach out to your HMI cohort and begin to reconnect—doing so will most certainly remind you of all that HMI still has to offer.
...MUCH OF THE HMI EXPERIENCE REMAINS JUST AS IT DID IN 1998, WHEN MOLLY AND CHRISTOPHER FIRST OPENED THE DOORS TO WHERE NATURE AND MINDS MEET.
We have tripled enrollment and constructed new buildings; Leadville has evolved, faculty have turned over, and the founders have departed. Yet much of the HMI experience remains just as it did in 1998, when Molly and Christopher first opened the doors to where nature and minds meet.

After first visiting HMI in 2001 to see longtime friend and history faculty Christian Denckla, Cooper began as science faculty in 2003 and taught from Semesters 11-20. Carrie joined the HMI family in 2007 as the Apprentice Program Coordinator, remaining in that position from Semester 19-38, and now acts as the Director of the HMI Semester. Neither of us would have predicted a 15-year run in Leadville with direct ties to HMI throughout, and our affinity for this place stems from the fact that the adventurous spirit, strong community, and exceptional quality of life persist through the years of change and growth.

Expeditions still use floorless pieces of nylon with p-cord holding them to the ground. While the style of tarps has changed, the rich conversations and bonding that happens under them remains the same. Laughter still surrounds Whisperlite stoves as students continue to favor the timeless classics: cheesy fried (insert preferred starch here) and pizza. Students in the current semester use the very same dromedaries to gather precious (funky?) water from potholes in the canyons. Evening Circle, silly games, yoga, sore backs, amazing sunsets, groggy mornings, sideways snow, trowel runs, contagious laughter, goofy costumes, and academic classes with amazing views remain standard field experiences for every HMI student—with mountain ridgelines and canyon walls framing these moments.

Back on campus, new buildings and raised walkways have not altered the defining core of residential life and the bonds of community formed therein. While the kitchen has gotten an upgrade and the “Hobart Challenge” is near impossible now, cook crews continue to prepare delicious meals while having dance parties. “Porta-parties” have given way to actual restrooms, but students still find amazement in the stars every night while making a chilly bathroom run. Solar panels have replaced lanterns in the cabins, yet Saturday wood chopping is as essential as ever for keeping the stoves stoked. Pranks, AMX, table order, chores, the climbing wall, sunny lunches on the deck, community meeting, cabin inspection, Saturday activities, and ski days are still very much a part of the time spent beneath Mt. Elbert.

Classes have considerably more space in which to be held (no more Who’s Hall divider), although P&P is still the defining course of the Semester and the age-old time management challenge associated with study hall endures. More faculty cram into the Dilbert Zone upstairs, but the quality, passion, and rigor of the coursework they deliver is as strong as ever. We still hold classes in the field, and discussions, research, and reflections continue to nurture strong connections with the local environment.

And Leadville? Same as ever. Maybe a few more amenities, new businesses, and visitors, but it is still the down-to-earth quirky mountain town students roam on weekend afternoons looking for thrift-store scores, coffee, snacks, and Melanzanas. The locals are as friendly and real as can be, and we like to think that the HMI culture has helped foster that as much as Leadville has reciprocated in keeping the school true to its roots.

For us, fifteen years of HMI-infused Leadville has helped us grow from the young couple just embarking on a career as educators to parents about to celebrate our 10-year anniversary. While the HMI community has grown and evolved, it has always been and will continue to be lively, challenging, supportive, and adventurous: a place for everyone affiliated with the school to call home.
I came to HMI in large part because of the school’s mission statement, a guiding vision that simply yet profoundly inspires all the work we do. This mission statement, a short paragraph expertly crafted to articulate the school’s values, both meets us where we are and motivates us to strive toward continued growth and excellence. We live by its words each day, and continuously return to it to help refocus our energies on what’s most important.

Ideally, all statements tied to a school’s value system mirror the impact of our mission statement: grounding and igniting. However, in reflecting on the efficacy and accuracy of our diversity statement we realized we had moved beyond simply honoring differences, as our statement suggested, and instead needed to actively engage with them; we wanted to claim ourselves as a school that offers transformative programming for the multifaceted identities of everyone who walks through our doors each year.

HMI recently decided to revise its diversity statement to “more actively celebrate and call for diversity amongst our students, faculty, staff, and programs.” While we knew that a more robust statement for equity and inclusivity alone would not solve any challenges we face, we did believe it could more clearly communicate the direction we want to take moving forward.

We formed a committee of Board members, faculty, administrators, and alumni to research, dialogue, and craft a new statement.

Thus began an 18-month process of writing, revising, rewriting, revising, and revising again something that met our goal: to demonstrate our commitment to unpacking our institutional biases and ensure that everyone who walks through our doors feels like they have the support to be their true selves.

While our old statement focused solely on diversity, our new statement rightfully focusses on both diversity and inclusion: “diversity” can mean ensuring a certain number of people of different identities, and “inclusion” means ensuring that those people feel accepted. At HMI, we are committed to both values. Our new statement grounds us in who we are as an institution while simultaneously propelling us towards greater heights.

In addition to writing and publishing a new Diversity and Inclusion Statement, we continue our work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive community by designing, facilitating, and institutionalizing initiatives such as community meetings focused on identity, a gender and leadership curriculum on expedition, stronger supports for marginalized students through advisory, academic scaffolding, and curricula that represents a variety of authorial voices.

As our new statement says, “We engage with this challenging work because we are committed to building an exceptional learning environment rooted in community—not just for some, but for all who seek to be inspired by the natural world.”

READ HMI’S NEW DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT: www.hminet.org/diversityinclusion
TECH TOSS:
HMI’S GIFT TO 21ST CENTURY STUDENTS

By Rebecca Schild, Co-Director of HMI Gap

At the start of every HMI program, we ask students to hand in their phones, computers, and music devices, perhaps leaving them feeling ripped bare of the appendages that aid their everyday communication, learning, and entertainment. They then depart for their first wilderness expedition, carrying everything they need on their backs and relying on each other to create fun. We ask them to watch, observe, and engage their senses in exploring the environment. We encourage them to open up, be vulnerable, and reveal who they truly are to the community of their peers. They stay up late to stargaze, awake at dawn to see the sunrise, and end the day feeling physically exhausted by the effort of simply living.

In reflecting on HMI’s history over the last 20 years I was curious: Did Christopher and Molly Barnes, in the founding of HMI, intend for the school to be a haven from technological demands? Could they have even envisioned the technological landscape of today? In pondering this question, I wrote to Molly who let me know that “technology was a bit of a non-issue” in 1998. However, it didn’t take long before the founders needed to confront the interface between technology and the HMI experience. Instead of being anti-technology, they grew protective of the school’s core mission. Anything that detracted from creating a strong community and connecting with the natural world was worth examining.

To this day, as the nature of technology continues to change rapidly, HMI responds accordingly. If the presence of a new gadget prevents students from engaging in the natural world or participating in a community of shared responsibility—drawing students away from our mission—then we craft thoughtful expectations and guidelines for how our students interact with it during their time at HMI.

Now more than ever, our everyday experiences and interactions are dictated by technology. Whether this is a net positive or negative to society is uncertain, but it’s hard to argue that we haven’t been fundamentally changed through recent technological advances. At HMI, and especially when we are in the wilderness, we have the opportunity to reflect on how technology both enhances our lives and takes away from other aspects of being present. By protecting what is central to us we have stumbled into a powerful space for our students, providing the gift of being able to unplug and develop meaningful relationships unmediated by technology. I can’t help but wonder what other unintentional gifts we will give to the students of the future.
Experience the magic of HMI in an awe-inspiring setting: trek through the future Patagonia National Park, witness conservation in action, and explore the many wonders of the Aysen region.

**TENTATIVE DATES: JANUARY 2-12, 2019**

**INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?**

EMAIL REBECCA SCHILD
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TO JOIN OUR MAILING LIST.