

A Tribute to Don Lawrence

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It is an honor to be asked to remember Don Lawrence, who befriended me and so many others, and who was such a seminal presence in Glacier Bay science. Being Don's friend was easy. All you had to do was be interested in his work and his beloved Glacier Bay, and you were in like Flynn. Don was a far more complex person than I can encompass, having seen only one facet of his life, so I will content myself with telling you what Don told me of himself, what I know of his work, and what I perceived of the man when I was with him at Glacier Bay.

Lawrence the Scientist and Thinker

Don was a student and protégé of William S. (Bill) Cooper, the University of Minnesota plant ecologist justly considered the father of Glacier Bay National Monument. Don spoke often of Cooper, not so much fondly as respectfully. Cooper interested the young Lawrence in the nascent science of successional ecology, first in the Minnesota pine barrens, then at Glacier Bay. When Cooper could not join an expedition to the Bay in 1941, he sent Don in his place to further his pioneering work, notably the reoccupation of his vegetation plots, which even then had substantial tenure (est. 1916). These were to become the longest continually monitored vegetation benchmarks in North America, thanks to Don, then Ian Worley, Mark Noble, and Glenn Juday.

He came to Glacier Bay at least nine more times between the 1941 trip and the mid '80s. A partial list of his accomplishments during that time:

- He continued and expanded Cooper's permanent plots.
- He was among the first to expand the chronosequence in time beyond the Neoglacial limits.
- He made comparative observations between Glacier Bay and other SE Alaskan glacier successional stories.
- He did some of the first experiments on successional mechanics at Glacier Bay, on his "farm" behind Goose Cove where he discovered the nitrogen-fixing capability of *Dryas* and demonstrated the importance of nutrient availability in the successional story.

- In the '50s, he began what became a habit of attracting quality scientists to Glacier Bay. For instance, he induced Crocker and Major to do their pioneering work on soil changes along the chronosequence, and his influence brought Dan Engstrom to the bay for his acclaimed work on lake ontology and Holocene plant history.

In addition, Don directly facilitated the work of many others:

- He gave Sandy Milner historical photos of the Muir Remnant area, which induced him to set up long-term stream ecology studies there.
- He gave Richard Carstensen slides of the Juneau alpine, which led to his documentation of post-Neoglacial changes there, and gave Richard funds to initiate his work on successional change in the wake of the bark beetle infestation at Bartlett Cove.
- He funded and encouraged his graduate student and friend Mark Noble in several endeavors at Glacier Bay.

For others, Don's work added impetus to an idea or provided context for more nuanced views of succession:

- The great monograph by Terry Chapin's group on the mechanisms and pathways of plant succession.
- Chris Fastie's seminal work refining the chronosequence paradigm.
- Lewis Sharman's extension of the succession concept to the Glacier Bay intertidal.

Lawrence the Ethicist and Steward

Don lived and worked under the old Jesuitical mandate that for every privilege there was a corresponding duty. And he took his duties very seriously. He was determined not to be a vector of successional change himself by transferring seeds to new ground. To that end, he always worked from up-bay down, carefully cleaned his clothes and gear, and never camped ashore when a boat was available (though I suspect his fear of large brown creatures may have reinforced the latter measure!).

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He did much in his quiet way toward conservation of his beloved bay. Don was a charter member of Friends of Glacier Bay, and its principal financial benefactor over the years. He underwrote FOGB's sponsorship of the first two science symposia, and made a large donation to the organization's endowment in his will.

Lawrence the Man

Don was one of the kindest people I've ever met. He was self-effacing almost to a fault, never seeking out the bully pulpit. He was happiest doing his work and supporting others.

He was blessed with a tremendous wife, whom he loved greatly and who was his constant companion. Lib was content to be Don's helpmate and confidant. She was even quieter than Don, but at least as brilliant and far more organized. Without her Don was lost, sometimes almost literally. I saw times when he would have forgotten to eat or be totally discombobulated in preparation for the field were it not for her.

Don could be very funny, with his contagious little giggle. I vividly remember that giggle at the FOGB organizational meeting, interrupting our passionate debate

whether to accept a donation from a business that had a besmirched environmental record. Recognized by the chair, Don offered, "The only problem with tainted money is there t'aint enough of it!", and brought down the house. We accepted the money.

My last memory of Don, when he was in failing health, is of a phone call. Don asked about happenings in the Bay: "what of the weather?; had the leaf-roller infestation in west-side alders run its course?; had the Cooper plots been visited lately?" Then, in a hesitant voice, he added: "Say hi to everyone for me...please ask them to help take care of Glacier Bay." Not long after that, he was gone. May we all live and die so well.

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Old growth spruce and hemlock forest, with understory dominated by Devil's Club. (Photograph by Bill Eichenlaub, National Park Service.)