

Marietta Downes will be missed (January 27, 2016)

Marietta Downes passed away this week. I first met the Downes family when they were living up The South Fork and had one of their children in junior high. Over the years she and her husband, Lee, became close friends.

Then they moved to the North Fork—I think over 30 years ago—and our friendship grew. Lee the perfect outdoorsman, hunter, trapper, fisherman, who made his living as a logger. Marietta the perfect backcountry wife. The Downes always had a big garden and Marietta canned everything they would need for winter—even round cakes in great jars, venison and elk and a few things they could not grow themselves, like peaches. She set up outdoors and stuffed and smoked sausages and visitors were always welcome. I always told her I could smell her cookies baking 20 miles away and that is what caused me to stop by so often. Truth is, she always had home-baked goodies so any day was a good day to visit.

Lee was one of the earliest North Valley Search and Rescue members and Marietta was one of the group of ladies who was key in feeding members on and after missions and at social events and fundraisers.

When they moved to their North Fork home a few miles south of Polebridge Marietta became our North Fork dispatcher since she had a telephone to contact search base and a radio to maintain contact with searchers in the field.

Some ten or more years ago she and Lee became the first life members of North Valley Search and Rescue in a celebration at their North Fork home. Marietta said she felt like queen for a day on that occasion. In that celebration they were presented with a metal sign made by Don Gimbel (also a life NVSR member) that says “an old bear and his honey live here” along with a smaller sign with their names on it.

In addition to their busy lives they also managed to raise a fine crop of kids who were with her in her final days.

Marietta was one of a vanishing breed of old timers. They believed in hard work, taking care of yourself and your family and providing for your own retirement not depending on the government. At the same time she had a deep commitment to her community and her friends and neighbors. She and her kind will be sorely missed.