


**GEIST  
WOLF ESSAY**  
PART 2 OF 3



DENVER BRYAN/IMAGES ON THE WILDSIDE



# DEATH BY WOLVES

## AND THE POWER OF MYTHS: THE KENTON CARNEGIE TRAGEDY

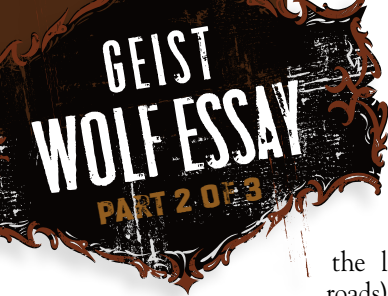
On November 8, 2005, 22-year-old Kenton Joel Carnegie, an honors and scholarship student in Geological Engineering at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, was killed in northern Saskatchewan by a pack of wolves. While he was almost certainly not the only victim of wolf predation in North America in the past century, judging from conversations with native people and a closer review of case histories, this was the best-investigated case to date. That investigation uncovered matters that need to be discussed because they have significant policy implications for wildlife conservation and human safety. First, however, we need to review what happened to Kenton Carnegie as it is relevant to the following considerations.

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### **Warnings, Unheeded**

Kenton Carnegie was in a university co-op program that allowed students to gain hands-on experience from visits to mining operations. In 2005 he flew to Points North Landing, a mining camp close to Wollaston Lake in northern Saskatchewan. Bad weather delayed his return. On November 4, two of Carnegie's camp companions had an encounter with a pair of aggressive wolves on the airfield close to camp. Todd Svachopf, an experienced bush pilot and Chris Van Galder, a geophysicist, beat back the attack, photographed the wolves, and told everybody in camp about the incident. Apparently their account was belittled, and they didn't immediately report it to authorities. Another warning came two days later as the young men dined at a local lodge, this time from experienced northerner Bill Topping,



who is a part-time car pilot (a guide who leads heavy trucks through the labyrinth of dirt roads) in northern Saskatchewan. He examined the photographs and told his guests that they were lucky to be alive.

During fall and early winter of 2005, wolf behavior around Point North Landing indicated a growing threat to humans. This began with signs of habituation, followed by the exploratory attack experienced by Svarchopf and Van Galder on November 4 and culminated in Carnegie's death four days later. The behaviors followed the pattern described for wolves and urban coyotes targeting children in parks. It is a pattern of increasing observation of and habituation to humans followed by bold attacks on pets and livestock. Next, the predators close in and test humans with skirmishes prior to the fatal attack. Both species of *canids* explore alternative prey in much the same manner.

Unfortunately, nobody heeded the growing danger before Carnegie was killed. Four wolves at Points North Landing had begun feeding on camp refuse that fall and were increasingly habituating to human activities. The lack of concern was probably due to the prevailing belief that wolves do not attack people.

### The Fateful Day

On November 8, at about 3:30 in the afternoon, Carnegie notified Chris Van Galder that he was going for a walk along the lake and expected to return by 5:00 p.m. Carnegie had on previous occasions hiked to fish the west shore of Wollaston Lake, an isolated area that was closed to unauthorized traffic. When Carnegie failed to appear for dinner, Van Galder and Svarchopf searched but could not find him in camp. Svarchopf saw Kenton's tracks in the fresh snow leaving camp, but not returning. About 6:30 p.m., the two men and Mark Eikel, co-owner of the camp, drove a truck to look for Carnegie. In the fresh

snow they easily followed his footprints, which headed south from camp, toward the lakeshore.

When the search party encountered wolf tracks, they turned back to camp for Eikel to get his rifle, a more powerful flashlight, and a radio. The party then drove to a nearby cabin thinking Carnegie might be there, but found none of his footprints. They drove back and soon saw that Carnegie's footprints left the road and headed down a trail toward the lake. There were wolf tracks on the trail.

Next, they saw Carnegie's footprints doubling back, and found a concentration of wolf tracks. Eikel shined his flashlight on what he thought was Carnegie's body and ordered everybody back to the truck to spare them the sight. Neither Svarchopf nor Van Gelder saw the body. On the way to camp, Eikel made a radio call to camp

employee Robert Dennis (Bob) Burseth, a long-term resident of the north and an experienced hunter. Realizing something tragic had happened, Burseth contacted his wife Rosalie Tsannie-Burseth, the local coroner at Wollaston Lake, and asked her to contact the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Next, Van Gelder called the RCMP from camp and the company office was notified. Eikel and Burseth returned to the scene a half-hour later. They parked the truck and walked down the ridge along the lake's edge, noting many wolf tracks. Eikel shined the flashlight and both men saw the body. They saw exposed flesh and ribs from the belt up; the pants appeared to be on. The two approached to within thirty feet and stayed only a couple of minutes before returning to camp to await the police and coroner, who arrived about 9:35 p.m.

The next time Burseth and Eikel returned to the scene, RCMP constable Alfonse Noey and coroner Rosalie Tsannie-Burseth had found that Carnegie's body had been moved about 20 yards from where Bob Burseth and Eikel had seen it some two hours earlier. Officer Noey's hand-drawn map indicated that the body had been dragged 20 meters.

Wolves readily move their kills—a fact that is well-established in Eurasian experience. At times, I have observed wolves moving domestic sheep carcasses more than a mile.

The group saw that more of the body had been consumed and there was no clothing down to the knees. Burseth confirmed to constable Noey that wolves had eaten the body, and that he had seen only wolf tracks at the scene. Four wolves—one black, one white, and two gray-tan in color—had been running together near camp earlier. Eikel confirmed that four wolves had been seen near the camp and at the garbage dumpsite just the day before.

Within 15 minutes upon arriving at the scene, constable Noey and coroner Tsannie-Burseth secured and inspected the site. They spent about 45 minutes examining and photographing the body and the surrounding area, taking care to minimize disturbance to

## MULTIPLE SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE

A potent feature of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation is its transparency and public accountability. What happens to hunted wildlife is very much a public concern. Citizens participate in discussions about hunting regulations and hold managers and public officials accountable in a very public process. Because of the openness and the depth of public concern, authorities must justify their decisions in detail, and that requires reaching for knowledge from all quarters.

Knowledge pertaining to wildlife flows from three sources: science, history, and professional knowledge that comes from experience. In North America, science carries the most prestige, whereas in central Europe knowledge historically came from the hands-on experience of wildlife managers. There, wildlife research is a relatively recent endeavor. It's my position that while accumulated professional experience is not the same as science derived from research, it is nevertheless rooted in reality and some of it reflects excellent scholarship. In Europe this body of professional knowledge—while not publicly circulated—is vital to managers such as the owners or lessees of hunting territories, the small cadre of professional hunters, and practicing foresters. This contrasts with North America, where wildlife science is strong and history is weak. It seems that here in North America, the body of accumulated professional knowledge is struggling to be recorded and heard.

This situation is problematic in the case of North America's wolf issue. The historic information is treated with neglect or disdain. Worse yet, it has been labeled as myths, species bias, or even fairy tales. The emphasis on "hard science" and the dismissal of historical knowledge can generate flawed scholarship and consequently, flawed legislation. As the philosopher Emanuel Kant put it, "We again learn from history that we do not learn from history."

The science/history conundrum pertaining to wolves remains unresolved. I believe it will be resolved, as deficits in scholarship do not sit well with scholars regardless of background. Moreover, pressures from stakeholders and the public will drive the agenda. And those pressures, arising from grassroots democracy and demanding of accountability, are another strength that our system of conservation is based on.

the original tracks. Approaching the kill area, constable Noey saw two wolves near the body—a sighting he noted repeatedly in his report and in conversations with others—and discharged two shotgun rounds into the air to scare them away. He noted many wolf tracks on the land and on the snow of the frozen lake. Bob Burseth and Eikel remained on the trail while constable Noey and the coroner went in to examine the body. At one point, Eikel discharged his rifle into the air, as wolves could be heard in the bushes near the body, and Buresth lit a fire on the trail to keep the wolves away.

With wolves still posing a threat in the area, Noey received authorization via satellite phone from constable Marion to remove Carnegie's body and return to Points North Landing. The group loaded Carnegie's remains into a body bag, then Noey began to take down witness statements.

### The Day After

Early afternoon on November 9, constable Noey, coroner Tsannie-Burseth, and her husband Bob Burseth returned to the scene in daylight to take pictures and interpret the evidence. Here are their joint results as summarized in the report by constable Noey.

Kenton Carnegie's trail headed south, and he was followed by a wolf that stepped into his footprints. Constable Noey surmised that this wolf was following and possibly stalking Kenton. I'll surmise that this wolf had cut off Kenton from the camp, as the two wolves described by Svarchopf and Van Galder had tried to do to them on November 4.

Constable Noey followed Carnegie's trail south past the kill site for a distance of about 60 - 80 meters that remained undisturbed by the previous day's activities. Carnegie had stood on the shoreline at a point in view of the camp, and Noey surmised that Carnegie may have been trying to get somebody's attention.

Also at this location, more wolf tracks converged on the spot where Carnegie had stood. The wolf tracks came from the south along the lakeshore. In reading that report I learned that several wolves approached Carnegie from the south while one wolf approached from the north, which seems to me like the wolves' hunting strategy. Since several wolves approached Kenton from the south, and one wolf from the north, this tells me that he was killed by at least three wolves and possibly by all four.

Carnegie's footprints then turned back toward the road; that is, up the trail heading north in the direction of the camp.

The snow was disturbed another 10 to 20 meters along the trail, indicating an

## The Witnesses

It is important to examine the skills and qualifications of the eight witnesses who were on the scene after Carnegie was killed.

**Mrs. Rosalie Tsannie-Burseth** is not only the coroner for Wollaston Lake, but also the Chief and Director of Education for the Hatchet Lake Band (part of the Prince Albert Grand Council a large diverse group of aboriginals). She has three university degrees, is working on her doctorate in sociology, and has a long career in public service. She grew up in the northern bush when her family was still fully dependent on their skills at hunting, fishing and trapping. She was tutored by her father in tracking. This articulate, humorous grandmother still goes hunting.

**RCMP Constable Alfonse Noey**, like Chief Tsannie-Burseth, is an aboriginal native, a hunter, and a long-standing northern resident. He produced a detailed report based on his and Tsannie-Burseth's on-the-spot investigations and questioned all witnesses.

**Robert Dennis (Bob) Burseth**, employee at Points North Landing, has 17 years of experience in the region and is an avid hunter. He is married to the local coroner and Chief of the Hatchet Lake Band, Rosalie Tsannie-Burseth. Burseth shoots bears that become a nuisance at the camp and after Carnegie's death, he killed two wolves at the camp's dump.

**Todd Svarchopf**, aviation officer and well-known bush pilot, is an employee of Sanders Geophysics, Ottawa, and is based at the Points North Landing camp. At the coroner's inquiry he testified that he had warned Carnegie against going out.

**Mark Eikel**, co-owner of the Points North Landing camp, is an experienced outdoorsman and hunter. After Carnegie's death he shot a third wolf from a distance of 250-300 yards. He testified that he would have seen a bear if it had been in the area, but none had been seen for at least a month.

**Chris Van Galder**, geophysicist, employee of Sanders Geophysics, was working out of the Points North Landing camp.

**Kelly Crayne and Mario Gaudet**, conservation officers, examined the kill site on November 10. I'll note that the crisp snow at the kill site would have allowed these men to detect the tracks of any black bear, had one been present.

In addition to the facts above, it is notable that the tracks and signs at the scene were examined by the following: two Native elders highly experienced in tracking; two experienced northern hunters; two conservation officers; a seasoned bush pilot; and a highly-trained physical scientist. Constable Noey and coroner Tsannie-Burseth not only identified wolves as the killers of Kenton Carnegie, they also deciphered the track pattern as showing a classic hunting pattern by wolves. The wolf pack had split and the wolves approached their prey from the back as well as from the front, cutting off any possible retreat. The two observers documented multiple attacks and a progression of the victim to final collapse. Moreover, four wolves had been habituating to camp activity for several weeks. The animals ran towards garbage disposal units and tore apart plastic garbage bags in the presence of humans. They watched humans and staged an unsuccessful attack on two camp residents four days before they killed Carnegie.

altercation. Constable Noey noted that the disturbance looked as if Kenton had rolled in the snow.

The footprints then headed across the trail a little way into muskeg-shrub. They indicated that Kenton was running, half on the trail and half on muskeg. There was a lot of disturbance of the snow.

From there it is a short distance north to the kill site where the body was first discovered along with pieces of clothing. When seen a second time, the body had been dragged about 20 yards from this spot.

In between were two sites where the tracks indicated that Carnegie had stood and shed a lot of blood. Photos also indicated considerable blood loss. At a third location, where the search party found the body, the evidence indicates he stood

shedding blood.

Constable Noey photographed until his camera battery gave out. He also collected all clothing pieces not found previously.

Around 2:31 p.m., constable Noey received a CD that contained photos of Van Galder and Svarchopf interacting with two wolves on November 4. Noey expressed surprise that neither had informed him of that attack. Recall, this is the attack that the two young men were able to beat off and photograph, then had been belittled. It was only after Carnegie's death that the significance of that event began to sink in.

It should also be noted that Burseth reported seeing three wolves running across the lake toward the kill site at about 7:45 a.m. the morning after Carnegie's death.

Two conservation officers from the

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Saskatchewan game department, Kelly Crayne and Mario Gaudet, arrived on November 10 to conduct an investigation. Their report stated, "Officers investigated the site and found numerous wolf tracks in the area. No other large animal tracks could be found."

## "Sexy Beasts"

Then came a surprise. The Saskatchewan coroner asked for the case to be re-examined by two scientists, Drs. Paul Paquet, a wolf researcher, and Professor Ernest G. Walker of the University of Saskatchewan. Before their confidential report was submitted, Paquet informed the popular news media that he recognized immediately that a black bear had killed Carnegie. Later, in a 2007 issue of *National Wildlife* magazine, this version of the story was related in an article titled, "Sexy Beasts," authored by Paul Tolmé. The story reads:

"Wolves remain a bogeyman today, as illustrated by the death of a Canadian man in 2005. When Kenton Carnegie's mangled corpse was discovered near a remote Saskatchewan mining camp of Points North Landing, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police immediately blamed wolves. The story made headlines around the world. But when noted wolf biologist [Paquet] of the World Wildlife Fund investigated, he recognized immediately that a black bear killed Carnegie."

The article attributes these quotes to Paquet: "The problem was bias right from the start. When I looked at the photos, I immediately saw bear tracks."

The National Geographic Society sent a team to film a re-enactment of Carnegie's death. Paquet acted as consultant. Victims of wildlife tragedies in North America tend to be blamed for the event, and it was no different in Carnegie's case. It greatly upset his family, as did the brazen and misleading whitewash of wolves.

Carnegie's parents were so upset by the "documentary" that they wrote a letter of protest to the National Geographic Society. They asked four scientists to do independent investigations and three agreed: Mark McNay, a senior biologist from Alaska; Brent Patterson, a seasoned scientist from Ontario with considerable wolf experience; and me. All three wrote reports concluding that Paquet's claim that a bear had killed Kenton Carnegie was untenable, and that wolves had caused the death.

Paquet responded that the eyewitness accounts were unreliable and biased.

This is an unsupported claim contrary to all evidence. In his examination of the photos taken by constable Noey, he judged the tracks heading across an overflow on the lake ice to be bear tracks. I'll note that the photo showed a place where wolves had stepped through a thin layer of snow resting on water, which consequently distorted their tracks.

McNay and I consulted colleagues in Alaska and Finland, all highly experienced with wolves, to double-check on our identifications. All concluded that the tracks in question as photographed by constable

Noey were wolf tracks. Further, McNay demonstrated that the pattern of the distorted tracks on the overflow were of a regular canid trotting pattern and quite different from the track patterns left by bears. In summary, three independent peer reviews confirmed what the eight eyewitnesses on the site had observed.

Paquet maintained that a number of forensic signs identified the responsible predator as bear. His arguments included the following.

*Wolves do not drag their prey from the kill site but consume such in situ.* Paquet claimed that Carnegie's body had been dragged some 50 paces. In North America, the experience of wolf biologists studying free-living wolves in wilderness areas is that wolves feed on their prey in situ. In my personal experience in British Columbia with wolves killing my neighbor's sheep, I observed that they moved their kills into cover, up to a mile from the sheep pasture. The European accounts of how wolves deal with prey, livestock and humans included, is that they carry or drag the carcass into cover away from attack sites that are close to human habitations. How do we reconcile this apparent contradiction? Quite simply. *Undisturbed* wolves consume their kill at the kill site. Wolves that are disturbed or close to danger move their kill to a safer location. That's what happened in Carnegie's case. The wolves fed at the kill site until they were disturbed by the first search party. When the second party arrived, they saw that the wolves

## WOLF SIGNALS ONE MUST NOT IGNORE

There are three types of attacks by wolves: those by normal wolves, single or in a pack; those by rabid wolves; and, the "mistaken identity" attacks.

**A RABID WOLF ATTACKS** swiftly and the only solution is an appropriate weapon and cold-blooded marksmanship. That's because an attacking wolf offers, briefly, a small bobbing target. Experience teaches that a hunting rifle with rapidly expanding soft-point ammo is best. Bullets that do not open up may not kill quickly enough to avert the attack. A good knife may be used to kill a wolf, but it's not a simple matter and injury to the victim is inevitable. If bitten by a wolf, quick medical attention and anti-rabies shots are vital.

**MISTAKEN IDENTITY ATTACKS**—which I experienced once by three wolves and another time by three coyotes—may resolve themselves quickly if the wolves recognize their mistake in time. Unfortunately, mistaken identity attacks do happen when wolves are drawn in by moose or elk calls, rutting buck vocalizations, and the like. The hunter may suddenly face swiftly approaching wolves. If only one wolf attacks, holding your fire to the last while shouting and waving an arm may suffice. But with a pack it behooves to be prudent and open fire in time.

**UNPROVOKED ATTACKS** by wolf packs do happen, typically when a person is out with dogs. Beware, a wolf wounded by a shot may scream and set off an attack by the pack! I know of a couple of instances in which people survived an attack by a pack. In these cases, the wolves were killed by skillful shooting before they reached their intended victims. History shows that once a pack grabs a person, it is too late, even if the victim is able to kill a wolf or two. Attacks by healthy wolves have happened where normal prey became depleted, causing wolves to search out alternative food sources. People are their last choice of prey, but unfortunately, we do remain on their list. The first sign of trouble is a single wolf or a pack watching you while they are in the open. Get prepared to defend yourself when this happens, but preferably, you will be able to get out and inform authorities.

**You should have a sound understanding of how wolves and coyotes target alternative prey. Both do it in much the same fashion. It begins with brazen, patient observation, gradually approaching closer and closer to the intended prey, followed by small, exploratory confrontations, followed by clumsy attacks, followed by determined attacks. A lone wolf watching you is bad business. Wolves that exploit garbage habituate even quicker to people. Once wolves systematically watch people and begin to approach them, it's time for their removal. Legislation such as in British Columbia, which allows each hunter a limit of three wolves, leads to swift removal of dangerous wolves. Had Saskatchewan had such legislation, Kenton Carnegie would likely be alive today.**

had dragged Kenton's body about 20 meters, not the 50 meters claimed by Paquet.

In the 2007 *National Wildlife* article, Paquet stated, "The clothes and skin had been stripped away, indicating the so-called banana-peel eating technique common to bears. How could Paquet know that? How many clothed human bodies handled by wolves have been available for examination in North America? Moreover, he ignored that the four wolves in question had plenty of experience ripping apart and peeling back the plastic of filled garbage bags, saturated with human smell, in order to reach discarded camp food.

*The wolves had not consumed the victim's liver and heart, which is also very uncharacteristic of wolves.* In the 2007 *National Wildlife* article, Paquet stated that "Carnegie's heart and liver—the most desirable morsel for wolves—were left intact." In fact, Carnegie's internal organs—namely those surrounded by fat—had been consumed. This fits with my own observations of wolves feeding on depredated sheep; they go for fat first. Paquet did not take into account that the wolves had been disturbed twice and were not able to finish their meal. Furthermore, Will Grave's book on the Russian experience with wolves includes a Russian scientist's observation that wolves, feeding on a freshly killed moose, had not touched

the heart, lungs or liver. Dr. Kaarlo Nygren from Finland made similar findings.

Let's think through the claim that a bear killed Carnegie. All forensic signs presume that the animal was standing or moving in about 1.5 inches of fresh snow. If a bear peeled away the clothing, then it must have had his paws on the ground in the snow. Moreover, the bear would have left tracks when entering the kill site, when it dragged the body, and when it ran from the first search party. Still more tracks would have been left when the bear returned to the carcass, and when it left again following the arrival of the second party. All this activity would have left abundant evidence that a bear had been present.

But, there were no bear tracks.

In examining photos of the site, my Finnish colleagues spontaneously identified a lonely fox track beside the abundant wolf tracks. If they found the track of a fox, would they have missed the tracks of a bear?

All the forensic signs pointing to bear, as proclaimed by Paquet, are thus misidentifications. His insistence that a bear killed Carnegie is not supported by the evidence, as shown by three peer reviews and the coroner's inquest.

Moreover, Paquet failed to grasp that the wolves involved were not merely habituating, but were targeting people as prey.

Wolves do this in the very same manner as do coyotes in urban parks when targeting children. Both canids explore humans very cautiously for a long time before mounting the first, exploratory attack—such as the attack launched by the wolf pair four days before Carnegie's death. Ironically, while coyote biologists recognized that this smaller canid will target people as prey, those studying free-living wolves were denying that wolves were a danger to people. Although the wolves around Points North Landing had signaled danger with their failed attack on Van Gelder and Svachopf four days before Carnegie's death, these signs were not interpreted as such, apparently because of the firmly entrenched belief that wolves are harmless.

### The Verdict

A hearing took place. The coroner ruled that only one expert witness would be allowed to testify on behalf of the Carnegie family and chose Mark McNay, the senior biologist from Alaska. A six-person jury listened to eyewitnesses at the scene, to Paquet, and to McNay's presentation. Jurors unanimously rejected Paquet's testimony, despite being represented by counsel. The jury found that Kenton Carnegie had been killed by wolves. ■

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