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Tradition Stone history through the years

The history of the Tradition Stone, based on both published sources and campus folklore:

1957
The stone appears on campus at the mock funeral of tradition after alcohol is banned from campus. The next day it is ordered destroyed, but is instead stolen by students.

1960
Two students bury the stone by a road, which is widened later that year, burying the stone under tons of dirt.

1961
Freshmen trade an unspecified amount of beer for possession of the stone and present it at the Freshman Bonfire. The stone is stolen by Charlie Leap, who eventually loses it to John Rosa and Ken Reed.

1965-1973
The stone's whereabouts remain a mystery. According to student Fred Brown, the stone made it to Seattle before returning and spending a couple of years at the bottom of the Chena River.

1974
The stone is dropped off in front of Brown's law office. Brown, a declared candidate for state representative, receives front page coverage in the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner.

1977
Students from the fire department find the stone and bring it to the campus pub. One group tries to take the stone by force and a fight ensues.

1983
Civil Engineering students Jim Baker, Steve Pannone and Henry Knackstedt retrieve the stone from Midland, TX, where fellow engineer, Gerry Foster, sent it in 1982.

1984-1988
The stone disappears until 1986, when it is dropped as students try to remove it from a pickup truck and breaks into four pieces. All of the pieces are stored in the Macintosh Hall gun room and remain out of public sight for several years.



Photo by Terry Kadel

The fragmented Tradition Stone sits in the back of a pickup truck in 1986, broken in body but not in spirit.

1989
Students steal the stone from the gun room in the summer of 1989, only to have it stolen by a group of Nerland Hall students.

1993
Campus police recover the stone as evidence in a forgery case.

1996
The stone appears at Starvation Gulch '96 in the hands of Sigma Phi Epsilon and spends the winter outside of Ian Olson's cabin on Farmers Loop.

2001
The stone appears at Sigma Phi Epsilon's fall formal. It is stolen by the Student Firefighter Association the next day and remains in the firefighters' possession for more than a year.

2003
Firefighters bring the stone to Starvation Gulch '03 to pass it on to a new group, but not without a fight. The fraternity ultimately ended up in possession.

2006
SFA steals the stone back from Sigma Phi Epsilon and displays it at Starvation Gulch, briefly engaging in a car chase with the fraternity following the bonfires.

2007
The stone reappears in the hands of SFA at Alumni Reunion events and is brought to Starvation Gulch. It is later bought by the Honors Program for an unspecified amount of beer.

Tradition Stone celebrates 50 colorful years

Story by Megan Otts

After being absent from public view for more than a year, the elusive Tradition Stone made its way back to the University of Alaska Fairbanks to celebrate its golden anniversary alongside its creators at Starvation Gulch 2007 in September. From the time it was created, the Tradition Stone has always served as a form of student rebellion on campus.

The tradition began on the evening of March 22, 1957, as hundreds of University of Alaska students marched through campus by candlelight, congregating around a freshly dug grave near Constitution Hall. A 400-pound concrete headstone marked the site, "Here Lies TRADITION 1957."

The memorial symbolized students' vehement objection to UA President Ernest Patty's ban of all alcohol on campus. Using beer bottles as candleholders, students sang songs, buried their empty liquor bottles in the mock grave, acted out a scene from Julius Caesar and reflected on the various ways in which tradition had died on campus under Patty's watch.

After the protest, members of the administration ordered the headstone destroyed. Instead, it was stolen.

A rolling stone gathers no moss

In the last 50 years, the stone has passed through countless students' hands, fiercely protected and surrounded by an unwavering air of secrecy. It has been bought, sold, traded and stolen, emerging briefly at UAF events such as Starvation Gulch and Springfest before being spirited off again to unknown locations.

Large gaps still exist in the Tradition Stone's history. At times, it has vanished for years on end, eventually reappearing with only rumors and speculation to account for its whereabouts. Though the stone has typically been kept near campus, students have come up with some creative hiding places to keep would-be thieves guessing. According to past holders of the stone, it spent a few winters at the bottom of the Chena River, was hidden in a swimming pool, buried under a roadway, used as a coffee table, hidden in a nearby cemetery and even used to support a mobile home.

Accounts have placed the stone as far away as Washington, Texas, Brazil, Argentina and Vietnam. Though many rumors exist regarding the stone's mode of transportation, sources say that it made numerous trips in the 1970s with student soldiers who were part of the Air National Guard.



Photo courtesy of Mike Brase

Mike Brase and Dave Janiak drive through the Butrovich Building parking lot in the early '90s as UAF students assemble in President Jerome Komisar's office to protest tuition hikes.

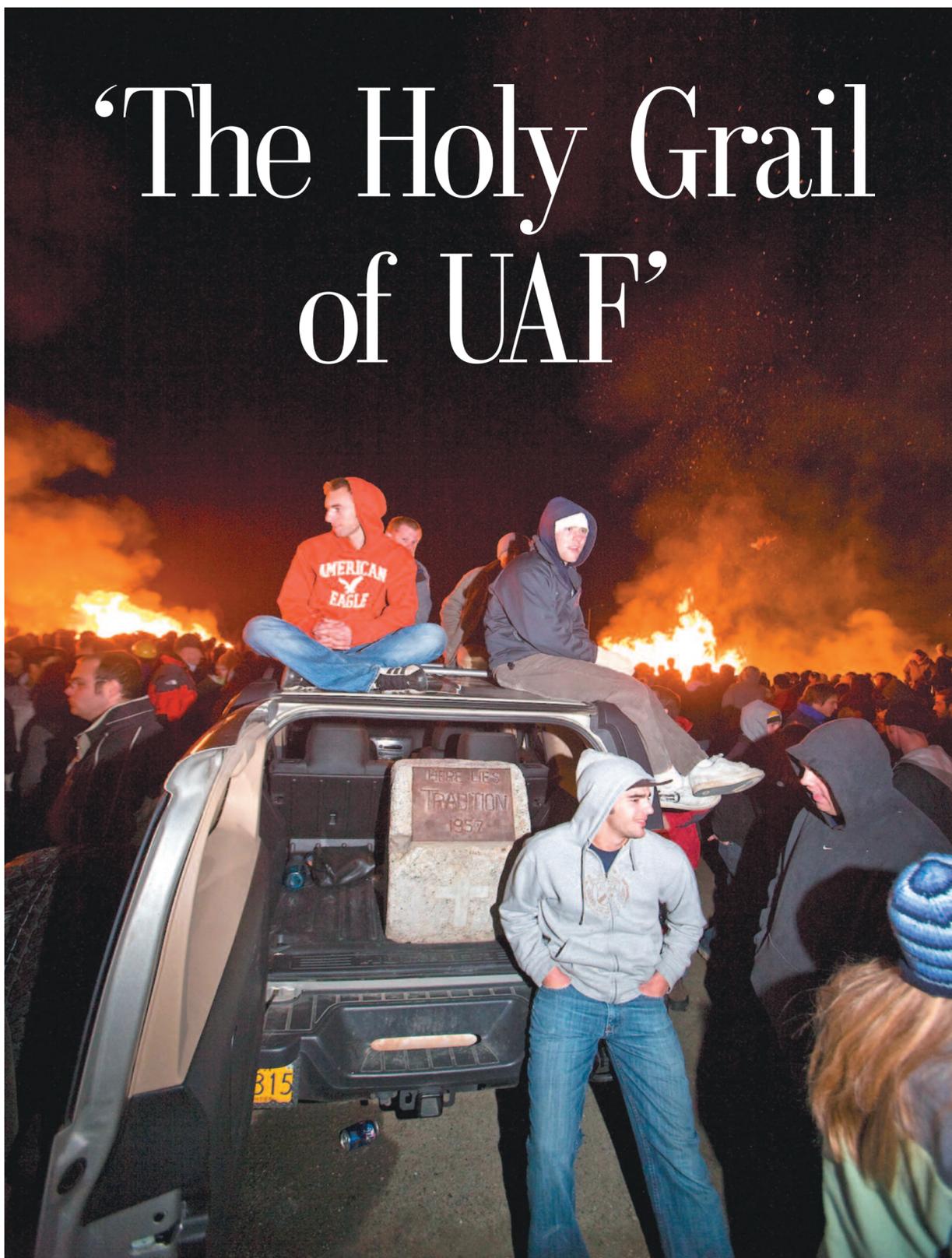


Photo by Todd Paris/UAF Marketing and Publications

University of Alaska Fairbanks students at the Starvation Gulch bonfires in September display the Tradition Stone in the Nenana parking lot on the UAF campus. The stone has spent 50 years as a colorful symbol of campus rebellion.

The stone goes undercover

In the late 1980s, Nerland Hall resident Mike Brase and a group of his dorm mates acquired the stone. They held it off and on until October 1992, when a student offered to purchase it for \$1,500. According to Brase, he met the student at the Gavora Mall, exchanged the stone for a check, went straight to the bank and found there had been a stop-payment put on it.

"This guy ended up talking his sister or cousin or someone who was a notary public into notarizing a stop-payment certificate, forging my signature, to the bank," Brase said.

A criminal investigation followed and campus police seized the stone as evidence. Because they could not prove who owned the stone, police made no arrests. The stone remained in an evidence locker for months, much to the dismay of UAF students and alumni, who eventually started "Free the Stone" campaigns.

In an interview with the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner in October 1992, UAF public safety director Dale Florian said, "It's amazing this thing has the stature it does. It's almost like the Holy Grail of UAF."

A much-needed makeover

During the mid-1980s, the stone was broken into four pieces when, according to Brase, "Some big lummox tried to lift it by himself out of the back of a pickup and dropped it."

On the up side, he said, breaking the stone helped students make an interesting discovery.

"In the bottom piece of (the stone), there was an old Hills Brothers coffee can embedded inside," Brase said. "We always wondered if it had been like a time capsule or somebody had something stashed in there."

In early 1993, the Tradition Stone made its way from the police station evidence locker into the arms of the UAF Alumni Association, which teamed up with the Associated Students of the University of Alaska Fairbanks to give the fragmented stone a makeover. Fairbanks Ceramic Specialty owner Terry Butler donated his time to piece the stone together and reattach its plaque.

After the repairs were made, ASUAF briefly considered putting the stone on permanent display, but the idea got little positive feedback, as few thought it wise to let a single group permanently control the stone. ASUAF eventually relented and the stone was reportedly left in the woods near the campus police department. It was quickly stolen once again, enabling the tradition to carry on.

A tradition tug-o-war

Since its formation in the early '90s, the UAF chapter of the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity has been a prime player, competing mainly with the Student Firefighter Association for control of the stone.

Scott Kawasaki, a Sigma Phi Epsilon alumnus and representative in the state Legislature, said he and his fraternity brothers held the stone on and off from 1994, his sophomore year, until graduation.

"We lost it a few times to other campus groups — the firefighters and honors house," he said, "but we always got it back one way or another."

He remembers when the fraternity reacquired the stone one night and the lead driver was so paranoid he was being followed that he refused to stop until he reached Anchorage. The next week, Kawasaki and a friend drove down from Fairbanks in a small hatchback to retrieve the stone for the fraternity's upcoming Founder's Day celebration.

"The stone was so heavy, we had to use a cherry picker for auto engines to hoist it into the back of the vehicle," he said. "We drove back the same night in blizzard conditions and slid from side to side as our tiny car was

TRADITION: UAF symbol of rebellion has come and gone, but is always just a stone's throw away

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weighed down. Good times.”

The stone has gone back and forth between the fraternity and the SFA numerous times, but the once-friendly rivalry recently escalated into heated chases and angry accusations, causing both groups to become increasingly secretive and wary of publicly displaying the stone.

Alums get in on the action

The SFA managed to steal the stone from the fraternity just before Starvation Gulch 2006, and this year a few fraternity alumni tried to return the favor. SFA member Mitchell O'Bryant said that the group let their guard down and nearly lost the stone at the alumni reunion luncheon in September.

“There were like nine of us there and we got hungry, so all of us left except (James Reidman),” he said. “On our way back, he calls me and his phone was broken up and all I heard was ‘frat’ and ‘stone’ and I was like ‘ahh crap.’”

Kawasaki and two of his fraternity brothers, Brody Anderson and Derek Miller, had teamed up with alumnus



Walter Armstrong, a UAF alumnus and former Sun Star photographer, took this photo of the Tradition Stone and its keepers in the mid 1980s. According to Armstrong, the three engineering students in the photograph refused to disclose their destination and insisted on blindfolding him to protect the stone.

Photo by Walter Armstrong

“Ozzie” E.L. Oszustowski and hatched a plan to procure the stone in the firefighters’ absence. Fortunately for the SFA, the fraternity did not have adequate manpower or transportation to

pull off the heist.

According to O'Bryant, the absent firefighters rushed back and found Reidman on a loading dock with the would-be thieves as they waited for their getaway

driver.

“Ozzie sat on the Stone and said that they would have to remove her first,” Kawasaki said, “but we later relinquished it without incident.”

The stone changed hands following Starvation Gulch 2007 and now resides with members of the UAF Honors Program. According to Reidman, this was a strategic decision, meant to get the stone back in to the possession of other student groups on campus.

“We are trying to make sure that it becomes more of a campus thing instead of just trading with the frat every couple of years and no one else sees it,” he said. “That’s why nobody knows about it now, because it has been underground for like five or six years.”

The stone's lasting legacy

Regardless of its current holder, the Tradition Stone has always served as a symbol of Nanook pride. It has become a lasting tradition on campus and the mystery and secrecy surrounding its whereabouts only adds to its intrigue.

According to Ian Olson, a fellow fraternity alumnus and past keeper of the stone, the unhindered protection of tradition is of the utmost importance.

“The stone is the type of thing that makes for valuable intrigue around the tables at the commons or among students at the Pub,” he said. “It gives a



Todd Paris/UAF Marketing and Publications
Cheri Renson, special events coordinator with UAF University Relations, poses with the stone at the alumni reunion luncheon in September.

sense of history to the institution that goes far beyond alumni photos and historical land markers.”

Kawasaki said he felt the stone has remained an enduring campus tradition because it embodies the need for students to challenge the UAF administration.

“The stone is symbol of that college spirit to fight back and defy authority,” he said.

Brase said that taking chances and displaying it is really what the spirit of the stone is all about.

“If somebody out there has it, they should actively use it, display it,” he said. “That’s just part of the fun.”

O'Bryant agreed, adding that losing the stone was a big part of the tradition.

“For me, stealing it was the funnest part, not so much having it,” he said.

“If we wanted to keep it, it could just sit in the garage and no one would ever know about it, but that’s just lame.”

A version of this story first appeared in the University of Alaska Fairbanks publication “Nanook Traditions” in September. Megan Otts is a journalism student at UAF.



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Box of snakes attracts police

MUNCIE, Ind. — This time, the snakes weren't on a plane — they were on a bus.

Now, a 21-year-old man who police say picked up a package of venomous baby timber rattlesnakes at the post office and took it home on a city bus is facing charges.

Dustin A. Draper of Muncie faces preliminary charges of possession of an endangered species and transportation of a dangerous reptile without a permit. He was in jail Friday on \$3,500 bond. It was not known if he had obtained an attorney.

Postal inspectors told the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and county police about the shipment of rattlesnakes. Officials were waiting for Draper when he got off the bus near his apartment Thursday.

“He wants to be cool and have venomous snakes,” said Sgt. Ed Rucker, a DNR conservation officer.

Anyone who handles dangerous or wild animals in Indiana must have a state permit, and possessing endangered species like timber rattlesnakes is illegal, Rucker said.

The DNR said Draper is a known buyer and broker of venomous snakes. He was arrested last November on charges that he tried to sell an undercover conservation officer an eastern diamondback rattlesnake. He was given a suspended 60-day jail term and fined \$360 in Muncie City Court. Draper also faces similar charges from August for possession of an adult cobra.

Draper has been advised to get a state wild animal permit, according to court records, although he never applied for one.

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