

Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center's  
***Wilderness Investigations***  
High School

**Wilderness Hero #2**  
***Margaret (Mardy) Murie***



Mardy (front row; 2<sup>nd</sup> from left) at signing of the Wilderness Act in 1964  
(Photo from Wilderness.net Image Library)

**Common Core Standard Connections**

Standards addressed will vary depending on how the teacher chooses to approach the lesson and/or activities.

**Instructions for the teacher:**

Margaret (Mardy) Murie lived much of her life in wild places. She never took those wild landscapes, or those she knew of but hadn't visited, for granted. With her husband Olaus, while he was alive, and until her own death at age 101, Mardy worked for the preservation of wilderness. She is often called the *Grandmother of the Conservation Movement*. She loved wild lands and was especially fond of seeing young people experiencing and feeling wildness in their own lives.

To help students get to know this amazing wilderness hero, choose one or more of the following:

- Photocopy and hand out *Wilderness Hero Sheet #2* to each student.
  - Based on the information found there, have them write a short biography of Mardy.
    - Use the *Writing a Wilderness Hero Biography (Prompt Page)* located in the Appendix if students are just learning to write biographies and need a little assistance with what to include.
  - The information provides geographic information about places Mardy lived or worked to protect during her life. Have students download a blackline map of the United States and indicate those places. Include dates and place names when available.
- Use the handout as the basis of a short mini-lesson about Mardy Murie.
  - To enhance your lesson, go to Wilderness.net and search for Mardy Murie. At the top of the page is a link to an audio from NPR that focuses on her life and achievements.
- Listen to the audio about Mardy Murie found at the top of the page about her life on Wilderness.net.
  - Based on the information found there and on *Wilderness Hero Sheet #2*, have students prepare their own news story (audio or video) about her life as a wilderness hero.
- Have students do research about the Presidential Medal of Freedom (which was awarded to Mardy in 1998).
  - Have them prepare a written report, informational poster, PowerPoint presentation or oral report about the award and why they think Mardy received it.
- Have students read about growing up as one of Mardy's children in her book Wapiti Wilderness (Colorado Associated University Press; 1985; Chapters 11 & 12).
  - Have them compare and contrast their lives and discuss how the Murie family's life centered around wild places.
- Create a *Wilderness Hero* classroom display or post on class website.
  - Have students create illustrations, maps, descriptive words, etc. that tell the story of Mardy Murie.
- Have students study and then place their copy of *Wilderness Hero #2* in their Wilderness Investigations Folder.

**Wilderness Hero #2**  
***Margaret (Mardy) Murie***  
**1902 - 2003**



Mardy in Alaska  
(Photo from Wilderness.net)

**Introduction to a Hero**

Margaret Thomas was born in Seattle, Washington August 18, 1902. When she was five years old she and her family moved to Fairbanks, Alaska. Mardy, the name almost everyone called her, was the first female graduate of what is now the University of Alaska. She married quiet, wilderness-loving biologist Olaus Murie in 1924 and honeymooned on a 500 mile dogsled research mission in some of Alaska's most remote wilderness. In 1927 the young couple and their children moved to Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

Mardy accompanied her wildlife biologist husband into wild places around Alaska and the west. When their children came into the picture (they had 3) the wilderness adventures continued with the entire family setting up housekeeping in some of the world's wildest landscapes. This was, of course, many years before the Wilderness Act of 1964 became law.

Mardy and Olaus spent most of their adult lives working to protect wild places. They were able to help protect what is now the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (19 million acres in Alaska) and pushed, along with

others, for a national wilderness preservation system. Olaus died in 1963 but Mardy kept working to help their shared wilderness dream come true. Mardy was invited to attend the signing into law of the Wilderness Act by President Lyndon Johnson in 1964.

Mardy lived in Jackson Hole, Wyoming near the small community of Moose until her death (October 19, 2003) at age 101. The *Murie Ranch* is now called the Murie Center. It is a non-profit dedicated to carrying on the work of Mardy and her family to establish and preserve wilderness.

**Here's a special story from Mardy's later years:**

In the months leading up to Mardy's death in 2003 she was often found sitting in her favorite rocking chair on the front porch of her log cabin or looking out its large front room window. Wrapped in her shawl she would quietly pass time with memories and observations of her beloved Jackson Hole home. She didn't engage in conversation often since the effort left her exhausted.

One chilly morning she was to host a very special visitor. Naturalist Jane Goodall, famous for her pioneering field work with chimpanzees and her popular books and articles about her life, discoveries, and conservation work was in the area to speak with young people about wild animals and landscapes. She asked if she could see Mardy (one of *her* heroes). The visit was arranged, but expectations of a protracted conversation between the two conservation giants were downplayed. After all, Mardy was 100 years old!

Jane was ushered into the cozy cabin and there sat Mardy in her usual place. Jane approached, hand extended, and spoke in a quiet, respectful tone to her hero and fellow conservationist. Mardy nodded but only said a word or two in response. And then Jane said just the right thing. She mentioned that she was in Wyoming to speak with young people about wilderness and wildlife. Mardy came alive! For the next 10 or 15 minutes, Mardy and Jane spoke animatedly about children and wild places. Smiles and hugs brought the precious session to a close. The two Conservation Elders had held their summit. The outcome: Young people and wild landscapes both deserved respect and support.

Upon leaving, Jane, usually talkative, remained quiet and reflective. As her van drove down the long driveway, leaving the Murie Ranch behind, she half-whispered to her driver, "That woman has done more for this planet than any other person I know."

(Story from the in-person observations of the van's driver, Steve Archibald)

### Other heroic wilderness actions:

- Mardy authored or co-authored many articles and books on wilderness themes. Some of her writings were biographical and others more focused in support of wilderness preservation.
- Produced a documentary film in 1956 while in the Sheenjek River wilderness of Alaska. This film, including segments of she and her husband Olaus speaking, urged wilderness protection and celebrated wilderness attributes.
- Testified before Congress in support of the preservation of millions of acres of Alaska wilderness.
- Featured in the documentary, *Arctic Dance*, focused on she and Olaus' lives as a unique married couple and as wilderness advocates.
- Led letter-writing campaigns to politicians advocating wilderness designation and preservation.
- Received the following awards in recognition of her work for wilderness preservation: the Audubon Medal (1980), the John Muir Award ((1983), the Robert Marshall Conservation Award (1986), the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1998), and the J.N. Ding Darling Conservationist of the Year Award (2002).
- Her family's property (the Murie Ranch) located within the boundaries of Grand Teton National Park became the home base for the Murie Center, a non-profit organization that is dedicated to carrying on the work of the Murie family.



Arctic National Wildlife Refuge  
(from Wilderness.net; Image #1914)

