

HIGH *when nature & minds meet* **MOUNTAIN INSTITUTE**

–FALL 2023/ WINTER 2024 NEWSLETTER–





As winter approaches, we are looking back on a summer and fall that was full of reunions, returnings, and robust HMI programs. Some highlights include celebrating 25 years of HMI and welcoming over 200 people to campus in June, Sam Critchlow returning to HMI as Head of School, and running a successful Summer Term, Fall Semester and Fall Gap programs that served over 80 students.

In this newsletter, you will find a recap of the reunion weekend, hear Sam Critchlow's reflections as Head of School, learn about our alumni employees, read an essay about an alum's experience running the Leadville 100, and much more. We hope these pages remind you of HMI — a place many have called home over the years, and one you can always return to. Happy reading!

THROUGH OUR LENS



- 04** LETTER FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL
- 06** 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
- 08** THEN & NOW: ALUMNI EMPLOYEES
- 10** EMPLOYEE REACTION: SAM CRITCHLOW'S RETURN
- 12** ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT
- 14** GRATITUDE FOR AMY ROBERTS
- 15** PRAYING FOR RAIN



TO FOLLOW MORE OF HMI'S ADVENTURES, FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



LETTER FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

This past June hundreds of HMI alumni returned to campus as part of our 25th Anniversary Celebration. Seeing adults return to the place they had called home for a mere matter of months, in some cases decades ago, reminded me of the indelible impact of this special place and community. Friends from across the country leaped into each other’s arms, walked the cabin loop, and joked, sang, and danced together.

Summer was a homecoming for me as well, as I moved cross-country from Maine to Leadville, just as I had sixteen years ago when I accepted a position at HMI called Mathematics Faculty & Wilderness Leader. This time, I was returning as Head of School. The place that awaited me was physically larger and more established as an institution. I too had grown in my time away, but HMI’s essence of people, place, and purpose was deeply familiar and welcoming.

Since I left in 2011, the campus has grown, as have the school’s programs, scope, and commitment to inclusion. In this timespan (almost half of HMI’s history), our alumni body has tripled in size, our campus has grown, we’ve added Gap, Summer Term, and Educators Expedition, our financial aid budget has quintupled, and we serve more than twice as many public school students, and three times as many students of color in our programs. These are things HMI should be deeply proud of, a product of thoughtful, intentional leadership, strategic governance, the incredible care and dedication of our faculty, staff, and apprentices, and the commitment and generosity of our students, families, and alumni.

I am delighted by these developments, but I am not surprised. The professional and personal growth I experienced at HMI as a young teacher eclipsed any other period in my adult life. Just as HMI accomplishes life-changing growth in our students in a short few months, the school itself achieves an accelerated developmental timeline, improving iteratively each semester, expedition, academic block, and program. I know of no other school that has come so far in such a short time: from yurts and a couple barely-finished buildings to a modern campus that over half our employees call home; from a plot of vacant land in a boom-bust mining town to one of Lake County’s largest private employers; and from a wild start-up idea by two far-too-young founders, to an industry leader and exemplar in outdoor and experiential education. We’ve come a long way.

And yet, so much is the same, in precisely the ways I would hope. Central to all we do is HMI’s laser-focused mission: community, wilderness, and academics (my paraphrase). We employ the most skilled, dedicated, and empathetic people I know. We strive to ensure every student feels a deep sense of belonging within our community. We run, ski, and chop wood. We dance in the kitchen. We scramble brownies and regularly burn hash browns. The students sing Taylor Swift (though more Midnight than Fearless, these days...) We start each semester with “the rock,” and end with Full Circle. These parts are familiar, and reinforce my sense that my move—2,000 miles in length and 10,000’ in elevation gain—isn’t an adventure, nor an expedition; it’s a homecoming.

—Sam Critchlow,
Head of School

“The professional and personal growth I experienced at HMI as a young teacher eclipsed any other period in my adult life. Just as HMI accomplishes life-changing growth in our students in a short few months, the school itself achieves an accelerated developmental timeline, improving iteratively each semester, expedition, academic block, and program. I know of no other school that has come so far in such a short time...

JOIN US FOR
“MEET & GREET” EVENTS
WITH SAM CRITCHLOW
IN THE FOLLOWING CITIES:

SEATTLE * SAN FRANCISCO
LOS ANGELES
DENVER * BOULDER

LEARN MORE AND RSVP AT:
hminet.org/meetsam



This past summer, we celebrated 25 years of HMI. Over 200 HMI alumni, family, and friends came to our campus in Leadville to reunite and reminisce.



“It feels like coming home. I think it always feels that way.”

— Alexa Adams, Semester 28 alum and Semester 40 Apprentice

“The Alumni of Color Retreat was a powerful and beautiful start to the HMI reunion; it reminded me how rare it is that we have the opportunity and the space to actively reflect on community experiences with those whom we have affinity with.”

— Laila Pina, Summer Term 2019 and Gap 2022 alum

25-YEAR REUNION

By Louisa McBride, Alumni & Development Manager

The weekend started with an Alumni of Color Retreat, hosted by Lupe Bobadilla, HMI's former Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. The retreat, "Returning To Our Roots and Elevating Our Voices" included a hike to Turquoise Lake, meals together, a conversation with Carmela Montenegro, DEI consultant for the Outdoor Industry, and meeting with HMI's Head of School, Sam Critchlow. This was an important and reflective opening to our reunion.

After the conclusion of the Alumni of Color Retreat on Friday morning, the remaining reunion attendees started to arrive on campus. Alumni took tours of new buildings, set up their tents, and reconnected with old friends. Campus was bustling with energy, and it was incredible to have alumni from HMI Gap programs, Summer Terms, and from Semester 1 all the way to Semester 49.

Everyone went their separate ways for dinner. Some enjoyed the new restaurants in town, while others used WhisperLite stoves to make pasta in the HMI driveway. After dinner, folks then came back to campus for a bonfire, s'mores, and live music on campus.



Saturday was full of activities! Starting off with a big breakfast to fuel up for the Fun Run, followed by opportunities to go to town, a picnic at Turquoise lake, Affinity Space meetings, networking events, and more. Saturday afternoon ended with a Coffee House where folks sang, played music, or read poetry. After many tears from a rendition of "Rivers and Roads" to close the Coffee House, it was time to head into the tent for the evening.

There was music, delicious food, and a dance party to end the night. A highlight was Head of School Sam Critchlow, also known as DJ Diction, taking the stage as the DJ for the party.

In the blink of an eye, Sunday morning had arrived and it was time for good-byes. While it was bittersweet, the weekend was a



reminder that you always have the HMI community, no matter how much time passes. This alumni community shares a unique bond, no matter how different campus might have looked when you called it home. We were able to share stories of Type Two Fun on expedition, memorable cook crew moments, chore spaces, and so much more of what makes the HMI experience so extraordinary, and often indescribable.

The weekend was one we will not forget, and are deeply grateful to everyone who made the trip to Leadville. We can't wait to see you at the 30-Year Reunion!

WATCH THE REUNION VIDEO AT hminet.org/reunion



THEN & NOW:

At HMI, we often find former students coming back to work as employees, apprentices, or interns. We spoke to Molly Lovett, HMI's Administrative Coordinator & Registrar about what it felt like to return to HMI as an employee after being a Summer Term 2014 and Semester 35 (Fall '15) student.



Q: WHAT DID IT FEEL LIKE TO RETURN TO HMI AS AN EMPLOYEE?

In many ways, returning to HMI as an employee did feel like coming home! The timing of my return was particularly auspicious– the 25-year reunion happened two weeks after I started working at HMI, and it was amazing to be reminded so explicitly and joyfully of the profound impact that HMI has had on so many students. Some of my most generative intellectual habits were sparked by my HMI experience, so it's amazing to be able to cultivate those tendencies as professional skills.

Q: AS A STUDENT, DID YOU THINK YOU WOULD RETURN TO WORK AT HMI?

My first experience with HMI was as a Summer Term student in 2014, then I returned for Semester 35. There are videos of me as a student in which I actually threaten to never leave, and I was pretty positive that I would come back in some way or another. In more recent years, I didn't think coming back was in the cards, but I was very pleasantly surprised!

Q: WHAT IS IT LIKE TO WORK WITH STUDENTS AFTER HAVING SIMILAR EXPERIENCES TO THEM?

It's been both challenging and fulfilling to work with students! Retrospectively, my HMI experience was profound and beautiful, but while I was a student here, I was just living my life. I feel conscious of my tendency to idealize my time at HMI and project that on to these students, who are just authentically building their own HMI experience.

Q: WHAT ELEMENTS OF YOUR HMI EXPERIENCE DO YOU HOPE TO SHARE WITH STUDENTS?

I hope that current students take advantage of the tools we give them to build community. Some of my HMI friends are still my closest friends! The words "intentional community" get thrown around a lot, but here, we give students the structure to live by their own values and hold each other to high standards. In that sense, it's such a unique opportunity for young people to build enduring relationships. I hope to share that perspective with students to help them to invest in one another and themselves.



EM DUCHARME
Semester 8 Alum
Director of Finance & Operations



RAY MCGAUGHEY
Semester 15 Alum
Director of Development



JILL GARDINER
Semester 26 Alum
Director of Admissions



EMILY SHANNON
Semester 31 Alum
Rations Manager



LOUISA MCBRIDE
Semester 31 Alum
Alumni & Development Manager



JESSI FRIEDMAN
Semester 34 Alum
Math Faculty

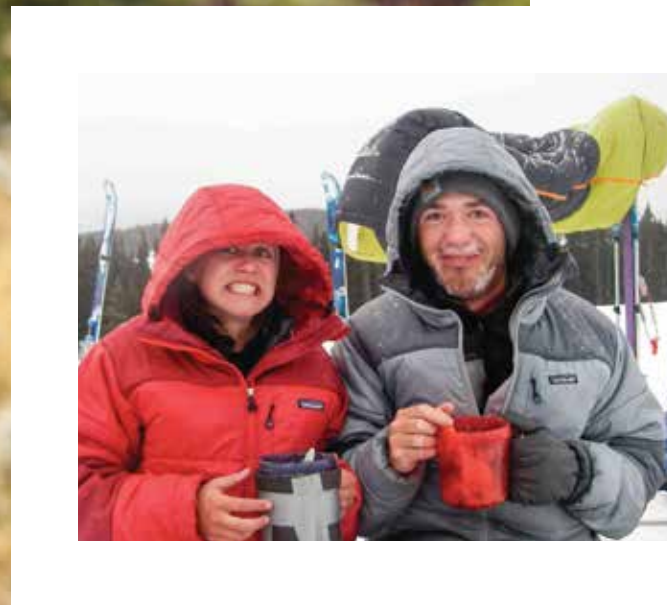


ALUMNI EMPLOYEES

EMPLOYEE REACTION: SAM CRITCHLOW'S RETURN

By Em Ducharme, Director of Finance and Operations

“ Sam has such a genuine and easy way of being, which I have seen colleagues and students alike gravitate to.



I first met Sam Critchlow in the winter of 2007. I was returning to HMI as an apprentice and Sam was in his first year as math faculty. I knew early on that he was a good egg from the series of expeditions and adventures we went on that first semester.

First came the winter training trip. We were in a tarp group together and it was during that trip that I remember the thermometer in our winter kitchen dropping to -40 our second night.

Not long after that was the first expedition for Semester 20, which was a failed attempt to go to the canyons due to the six feet of snow that fell on us as we pulled into Blanding, Utah. They closed the roads so we couldn't leave town, and on our first night we all slept outside under one of the town pavilions, then spent the second night on the floor of a Blanding church gymnasium, and finally drove all the way back to HMI.

Next came Second Expedition, the winter trip. Sam and I got to lead together along with Molly and Christopher Barnes. I remember Sam being an appetizer aficionado in our kitchen and beginning his multi-year petition to be able to bring a split board into the field, rather than having to ski.

And finally, Sam and I got to lead Semester 22's First Expedition to Fish & Owl canyons. It was during this expedition that I remember Sam bestowing a well-known backcountry "pearl of wisdom" to me. It came after listening to our student hiking group argue all day about what meal they should make for dinner later that night. The timeless debate of whether to cook their favorite or least favorite meal first. As we were deciding what to make for our own dinner that night, Sam said, "if you're always eating your best first, you're always eating your best." I think of this often, even in front-country life!

These expedition memories can be summarized as hilarious, epic, inspiring, and just the type of experiences that make HMI so magical. And those are all also qualities I'd use to describe Sam. Silly, creative, motivating, experienced, and one of HMI's "pillars" of the community.

Sam has such a genuine and easy way of being, which I have seen colleagues and students alike gravitate to. I know he claims to be an analyst architect at the core, but I would argue that he is just as much a spontaneous motivator. He is creative, he remembers how to have fun, and his field of gravity draws everyone around him into whatever potato-cannon type of silliness he's creating.

He also clearly knows how to create new systems, processes, and strategies. He is a realist and can be a driver when needed. And he continues to impress me with his empathy and curiosity, both as a leader and as a friend.

At HMI, we use the "leadership grid" as one way of illustrating how each of us identifies as a leader. We teach students the most revered and effective leaders are able to step into any quadrant at any time, depending on what the situation needs. Everything I know about Sam points me to believe that he is adept at accessing all quadrants, when needed, with both logic and intuition.

I remember one day in March 2022 when we were just beginning the search for the new head of school at HMI. I sent Sam a message, saying, "You need to apply to be the next HOS at HMI! We need someone who has the analytical mind, institutional mindset, and spontaneous motivator capabilities. So seriously, think it over." Needless to say, I was thrilled when Sam accepted the job.

When anyone asks me these days, how work is going with the new head of school, I find myself earnestly saying the same thing over and over again: "Honestly, I feel like we won the lottery. I couldn't imagine anyone else being in this role."

Pictured on page 10: Sam and Em on winter training trip, 2007.



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT:

ALDEN ISELIN'S LEADVILLE 100

My name is Alden Iselin, I am a Semester 48 alum (Spring '22), and I ran the Leadville 100 this past August. Before coming to HMI I knew of the race, having previously run a couple of marathons I was very interested in what a 100-mile run would feel like. Upon arriving on campus I quickly learned that one of the teachers (Jacob Sheetz-Willard) is a many-time Leadville 100 finisher. After picking his brain for hours on expedition, I knew I was destined to run this race at some point. Jacob excited me enough that I signed up for my first 50-miler when we returned to campus, and that summer I contacted a charity to join their fundraising team for the 2023 Leadville 100. At that point, running Leadville was a sure thing.

Ten days before the race I arrived on the HMI campus for the first time since leaving a year before. It felt amazing to be back on campus and relive some of my memories from the semester, though it was a little weird being there without the rest of Semester 48.

Fast forward to race day, I had an early 2:45 a.m. wake-up to make the 4 o'clock start. I got to the start/finish line twenty minutes before the race began, and was met by a thousand other people with the same nervous, scared, and excited look on their faces. At that point it finally sunk in that I was going to be moving for the next 30 hours or so. Then at 4:00 a.m., a shotgun went off and the race was on.

My crew for the race was made up of my mom, Jacob, two apprentices from Semester 48, my friend from Semester 48, and her mom (who are also ultra-runners.) I saw them six times during the race and their job was to keep me on track with pace, calories, hydration, and all the other things that could be an issue.

Throughout the race, I experienced a range of feelings from a 100/10 to a -50/10 on the happiness scale. Looking back, I know the low moments I felt were temporary, but in the moment it felt like I would never get out of the hole that I was in. Part of what makes ultra-running special is seeing how you react in moments like those. Doing that in a beautiful place which you feel connected to makes that experience one hundred times more special. Passing by the Fish Hatchery and Turquoise Lake brought back memories from my time at HMI that reminded me why I was running. Coming full circle and running Leadville felt right.

I think it's hard to understand the spirit of ultra-running without seeing a race for yourself. Leadville in particular feels incredibly special. The town, volunteers, and crews rally behind the race in a way that creates the most amazing community and sets the Leadville 100 apart from the rest. I hope I can come back to run it again.

An in-depth rundown of my whole Leadville 100 experience would be a pretty long story, so instead I'll share a couple of moments that stand out:

MILE 38

I ran into the Twin Lakes aid station feeling super hot and dehydrated. Within three minutes I had a popsicle in each hand, ice being put into my hat, and water being dumped down my back. I then proceeded to lie down in the Arkansas River.

MILE 44

I was running down Hope Pass and stubbed my toe SO HARD.

MILE 57

I was going up Hope Pass the second time and felt horrible. It was so hard.

MILE 68

We sang Sweet Caroline with another runner.

MILE 78

I got extremely cold and my knee began to hurt. From that point on I could no longer run and had to walk to the finish.

MILE 85-97

I became very cranky with how slow I was moving and got bored of walking.

MILE 100

I walked across the finished line with my crew, finishing the race with a time 29 hours and 11 minutes.



GRATITUDE FOR AMY ROBERTS

By Ray McGaughey, Director of Development

At HMI we spend a good deal of time sharing gratitude. On campus, we have a tradition called Grati-Tuesdays where community members publicly thank one another for acts of kindness. With the passing of the HMI leadership torch to Head of School Sam Critchlow, I'm inclined to share gratitude for Sam's predecessor, Interim Head of School Amy Roberts.



If I were to acknowledge Amy in the succinct format we use on Grati-Tuesdays, I'd say: Thank you Amy for guiding our school through some challenging times and helping us laugh along the way.

Amy arrived in the summer of 2019 to be our next Director of the HMI Semester. A NOLS alum and independent school veteran who had grown weary of New York City, Amy brought the zeal and excitement of someone who had been waiting their whole career to work at a place like HMI. We quickly learned that Amy's style was defined by calmness and grace. She held her colleagues to high standards while also caring for us and advocating to make our jobs better. We were so excited to have her.

Little did Amy know that eight months into her new job, the world would be turned upside down. In March 2020, shortly after Semester 44 students returned from their winter expedition, Amy, along with Head of School Danny O'Brien and our board of trustees, made the impossible decision to send students home in the face of the oncoming pandemic. As I look back on it now, I realize that it was Amy's adaptability, positivity, and resilience that got us through the difficult months and years that followed.

As Director of the Semester (and later Acting Head of School during Danny's sabbatical) Amy did everything she could to take care of her team. She believed—rightfully so—that the antidote to pandemic-era isolation and burnout was levity and fun with coworkers. From white water rafting to kickball to backcountry hut retreats, Amy was always planning the next all-staff activity or get-together. These team bonding moments were uplifting, especially in the wake of mask mandates and social distancing.

With Danny's departure in the summer of 2022, Amy stepped into the role of Interim Head of School while our board conducted a national search for our next leader. During this year of transition, Amy helped HMI not just survive, but thrive. Amy rolled up her sleeves and did what needed to be done. She became an expert in such diverse topics as fundraising, property insurance, and our septic system. Looking back through old emails from Amy I laughed out loud when I read one titled: "Urgent! Happy Valentine's Day!" The email kicked off a school-wide thread about our favorite aspects of working at HMI. This was a classic Amy—always working to keep morale high during challenging periods.

Although Amy and her family have left the frozen tundra of Leadville for the sun-drenched beaches of Orange County, California, her legacy lives on. Those of us who worked with her will miss her thoughtfulness in the face of crisis. Her people-first leadership style. Her excitement about learning to ski and chili cookoffs.

Amy, we are grateful for the work you did to make our school a better place.

Thank you.



Jacob Sheetz-Willard, HMI's English Faculty won The Telluride Institute's 2023 Cantor Prize for his poem, "Praying for Rain".

PRAYING FOR RAIN

By Jacob Sheetz-Willard

I keep using the word *definitive* in text messages. I keep standing outside at dusk to watch the way days end. Last night, my mother sent a picture of a stone hanging from a chain somewhere in Scotland. *If the stone is wet*, the placard says, *it's raining; if you see the stone's shadow, the sun is out*. It rains, or it doesn't. It is or it isn't. *Definitively* I say, as if it were a catechism, a way to make myself believe in principles of demarcation, the line set down between one thing and another. Last week, I sat in a park between two friends whose sudden love for each other left old loves in its wake. The underside of the sweetbay silvered in the heat above our bench, and each of us knew what not to say out loud—that every *clean break* is a two-part equation with a bit of breath still inside it. The newsmen says *the war is over*, but everywhere I look there are battles going on in both directions. Tonight the sky can't seem to make up its mind—low clouds with a blue light filtered through. It's hedging its bets.

HIGH MOUNTAIN INSTITUTE

531 County Road 5A

Leadville, CO 80461

TEL 719-486-8200

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



**GIVE THE
GIFT OF HMI**

This year, we hope you will consider a gift to HMI to support our mission of connecting students with the natural world.

hminet.org/donate

