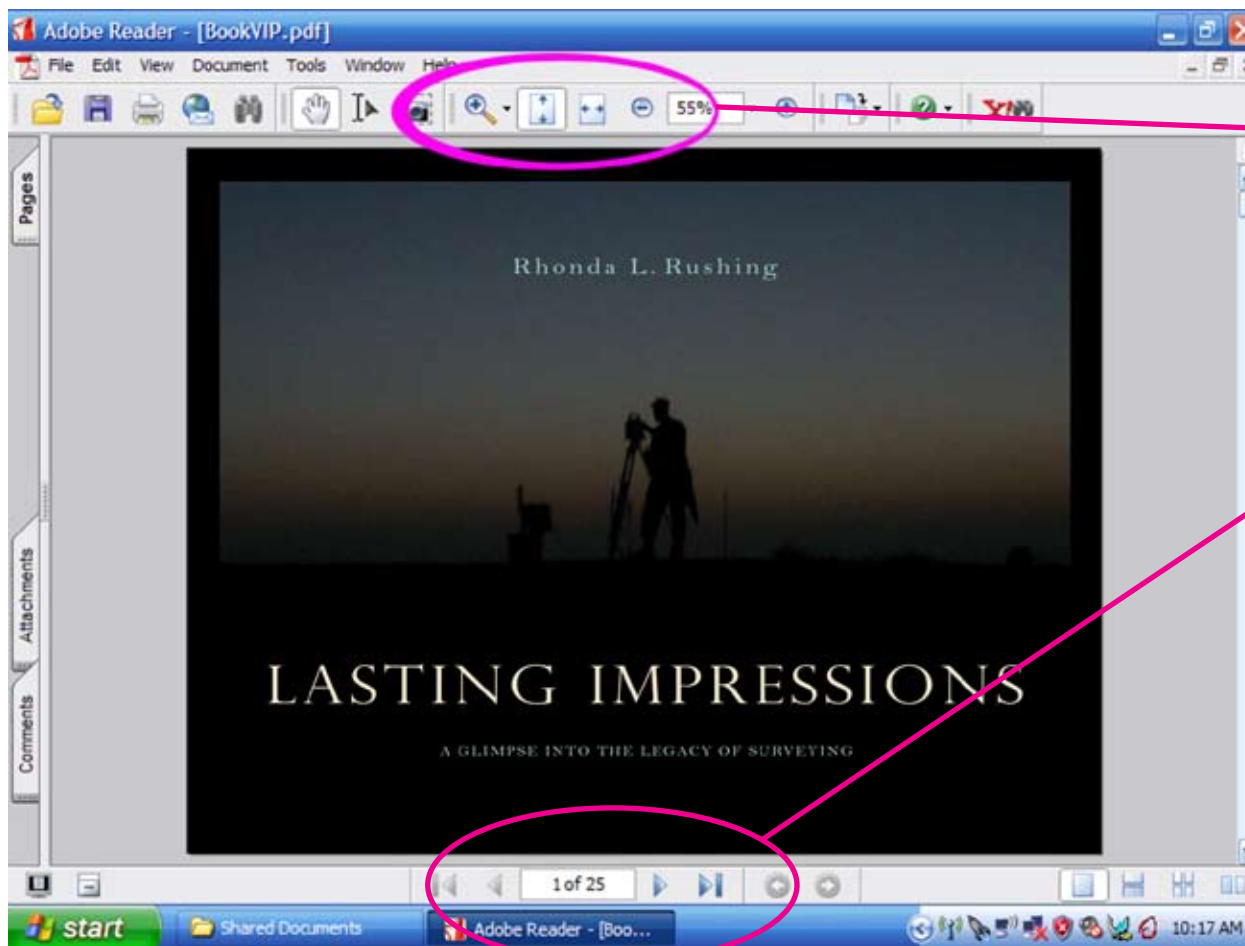


LASTING IMPRESSIONS

FIRST FEMALE SURVEYOR ON THE SLOPE



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FIRST FEMALE SURVEYOR ON THE SLOPE

During my sophomore year of college studying Geomatics at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi, I applied for and landed an internship for a Global Positioning System (GPS) field surveyor for Western GeCo on the Northern Slope of Alaska. I was the first female surveyor ever on the Slope, and I was all of 19 when I arrived in December of 2000 (although I turned 20 shortly thereafter). We lived in mobile CAT camps (strings of trailers on huge skis) that were pulled over the spread of our 300-plus-square-mile, seismic grid by CAT tractors. We surveyors on the crew were well-respected for our daunting task of going ahead of the camp to establish our control network and test the depth of hundreds of small lakes and creeks that were frozen over. We were only permitted to be on the tundra during the winter months when the depth of permafrost was at its greatest. We established and mapped the trails that all those behind us on the crew would come to use. We faced blizzards and whiteouts with wind chills below -125° . We surveyed in 24-hour-a-day darkness for the first few months, and then we surveyed in 24-hour-a-day light by the time we left. We mapped the location of army debris left over from test operations on the slope during the 1950s. We noted the location of sparse stakes and particularly-placed caribou antlers that were used as signposts by the natives, abandoned dogsleds, and even a vast scattering of sand dunes. I saw wild herds of caribou in their natural habitat. I saw native Inuits and Athabascans who trekked the arctic searching for wolverine and bear to take back to their villages. I traveled from the northernmost town of Barrow to the booming city of Deadhorse (Prudhoe Bay). I learned the fine art of rationing on the days our supply plane couldn't land and just how good melted snow could taste. I learned the fine art of "making do" when our survey equipment or our navigation equipment would fail. It was my first taste of survey fieldwork, and it gave me the experience of a lifetime. When I now show pictures of my trip to friends and family, they are often impressed and amazed, with the exception of my survey marker pictures. They could not understand the pride I felt in our "Ozzy" control point or the significance of finding a National Geodetic Survey (NGS) monument in the vast frozen nothingness of the Slope. I remember finding the NGS monument and feeling like I had found a lost memento from a deceased family member. I was standing in the footsteps of a previous surveyor, and I understood the hardships that he must have endured to set the monument, some years before innovations in arctic gear and surveying equipment, and I felt a strange camaraderie like never before. It was with equal satisfaction that we set our Ozzy control point, knowing that years into the future, surveyors would find our mark and know that they were not alone in that immeasurable wilderness.

— Brianne Bernsen, RPLS, LaGrange, Texas

THANK YOU!

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