

adventure

ALASKA

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Challenges, challenges

After last season's ice devastation of our "compound" in Eagle, this season too proved daunting on disparate fronts, though not permanently so. No season is exactly like another, and even after twenty years of them, one can't help but be humbled by the vagaries that define each. Mother Nature should never be expected to be predictable, and maybe even less so are the actions of hapless humans. The former washed away roads, and the latter took out a bridge.

First off, the road to Eagle has now been closed for more than eight weeks. In what was to be a summer of rebuilding, materials, personnel and the visitors to help fund the efforts, have all been shut out. This in a town suffering from the unprecedented 2009 flood (www.adventurealaskatours.com/eagleflood.htm), and where the only road is open but during the brief summer months. Liam and Todd were just finishing more than a month rehabilitating our cabins there (we're about 70%!), when more than four inches of rain obliterated long sections of both the Taylor and Top of the World highways. Fortunately we had flown to Eagle.

Bringing all surface travel to a standstill, we were but a part of the economic blow to the town, having to quickly reroute our trips destined there. Mid-August promised a partial reprieve in the way of emergency repairs allowing scheduled one-way convoys, but a return of rains overwhelmed the still-saturated ground and the road closed again after three days. As of late September, periodic



One of the "slides" --already a tenuous road connection

convoys are again envisioned. Getting in the winter's worth of supplies, be it fuel or groceries, will take on a whole new urgency given the looming seasonal closure of October. It's of small consolation that we at least, are not of those making their home there, enduring these travails on a daily basis.

Next off is the more certain result of bone-headed human folly --the structural damage of a historic bridge on the road (once again, the only!) to McCarthy by a brain-dead hauler of heavy equipment. Crossing an antique one-lane former railroad bridge at high speed, with an excavator extending several feet beyond the clearance, is demonstrably not a recommended strategy for ensuring continued employment in a tough economy.

Occurring while one of our camping groups was on the "other side", the panic of sudden closure was ameliorated by the fact that they had ample food, a "reserve" van, and a great guide full of adrenalin. In short, the drama consisted of the van full of gear speeding down the gravel road 14 miles, to slide across the bridge just (literally!) as the DOT officials were barricading it closed. Hitchhiking back to McCarthy, consummate guide Sheri used our resident back-up van there to pick up the folks and shuttle them to the bridge, walking across to rejoin their original "mother ship" and gear. The trip continued unimpeded, though for a long moment, the furiously gamed scenarios, profanity, and consequent sighs could most likely be heard from afar. And, did we mention -- Anchorage set a record (by 5!) of the most consecutive days of precipitation. Oh, and then there's that little trifle, the economy.

Nonetheless, we look back, and to the future, feeling quite fortunate on so many fronts. Life has its rhythms, but we still



A massive road breach - ancient permafrost exposed

have the livelihood of our choice.

As for the actual business of tours, the folks this season that we had the privilege to host all felt like family, and in fact some wonderfully came as such. The Freeburn crew came as an inspirational juggernaut of three generations (see the latest installment below). We also had some delightful returnees (or, should we say "recidivists"), as well as surprising number of gluttonous souls doing back to back trips . . . you know who you are . . . New friendships and renewed ones, it's what it is all about.



Tribalism, at its very very best

New News

Well, with that future in mind, we do have a bit of an announcement to make. Undaunted by the economic climate or good sense, we are branching into a whole new neighborhood. The desert. Yup, right up our alley and in keeping with our expertise. The truth is, we have for years been looking for a wee excuse to offset the "seasonality" of the far North, both in livelihood and length of winter. After years of wandering, we have chosen the Big Bend area of deep southwest Texas. It's wild, woolly, and remote, with surprising parallels to Alaska. The land dominates, and its severity is integral to its beauty. There's rugged mountains, a wild river(!?), and lots of solitude and of course, the unique ilk that chooses to call it home. So, with the idea to run a few small-scale trips in the fall months, we have committed to a wee compound near Terlingua, sandwiched between two huge parks, the Big Bend National Park and Big Bend Ranch State Park. We've been researching and exploring furiously for the past several years and have worked out some tentative itineraries. Check out the website: www.adventurealaskatours.com/bigbend. Stay tuned, wish us luck and, "C'mon down"! (*note the drawl*)

And, in keeping with the timeliness of the Neanderthals, we are joining the age of social media. Yes, kicking and screaming, we at last have a Facebook page. If so inclined, become a "fan" and receive periodic updates. No, no twittering.

Staff Updates

Leaving the best for last, we give you our annual guide update, prefaced of course with nothing but kudos and admiration for these folks who dedicate their summer to being our ambassadors of Alaska. **Patrick** returned for his 18th year, enthusiastic as usual though like all of us, with a diminished schedule. He's now soaking up some much needed vitamin D on the beaches of California before deciding what's next, France or Australia. Oh, the burden. **Sheri**, and husband Michiel returned to much fanfare (and a couple of stints guiding!), after spending what they vowed was their last winter in Antarctica. He's back there now and Sheri will be shortly. They have, in their fine wanderings of search, at last decided on a place of permanent (semi?) repose, the ever repugnant, south of France. Their long term plans include tours there, so stay tuned at michielandsheri.blogspot.com/ **Kathleen & Chris** got the summer off too, though we did have some wonderful visits



The almost-residents of McCarthy (no, not all related)

from them in Hope. **Joe** sat this one out, but he and family are frequent folks in Hope with their cabin here. . . available for impromptu guide "reunions". **Barb, Todd and Liam** had been looking at the holes in our summer schedule as an opportunity to actually taste a bit of Alaska's fleeting summer, but repairs in Eagle, cabin rentals, and guiding conspired against such frivolity. September redeemed the summer of rain, resulting in three weeks without. McCarthy under sunny skies was wonderfully therapeutic, and the memories will hopefully help the winter months where that big warm ol' orb seems only a fairweather friend. They'll soon be heading to parts south, exploring parks, visiting family and of course, that little project in the Big Bend.

!!! Repeat Offender Program !!!

ANNOUNCING JUSTIFICATION FOR THOSE GLUTTONOUS ENOUGH TO THINK OF RETURNING FOR A TRIP WITH US —If you've survived one before, you get a 10% discount on the next one. Maybe try a new itinerary or another season --The Iditarod! We'd love to see you again!