

adventure

ALASKA

September 2012

Volume 18 Number 1

Toward normal?

Well, after a few years of at times bemoaning both Nature and Man, we've only fine things to report on both this season. No natural disasters, and at least for this year, the economy for our enterprise felt like it approached something from a fond memory called "normal" (whatever that is). The creek by our camp in McCarthy, even returned to its old channel. Even through the customary ups and downs of our typically fickle weather, most groups somehow managed to find sun, some spectacularly (photos of Alaska sunburn anyone?). Earl Porter, on his seventh trip with us, finally saw the great mountain Denali. It almost makes one fear for the future.

And while we can't vouch for each and every guest's personal experience, all seemed enthused and appreciative of their Alaska adventure and unique moments. Providing that satisfaction has always been the goal, and witnessing it is truly what makes this avocation more than just that. From being surrounded by herds of caribou, to flying the summit of Denali on a sterling day, to the lucky souls that showed up tired and bedraggled for an overnight on the remote Denali Highway, only to find the reservation missing and the inn full, the moments were many. To finish that story, the refugee group ended up quite late at the dentally challenged but supremely memorable Meiers Lake Roadhouse. Their stories were priceless, and a seeming disaster ended up a highlight. Again, we're hoping the karma debit account is not overdrawn.



Teamwork - though by a bit of a motley one



Onward and on to the Root Glacier

For those of you with a connection to the unique hamlet of Eagle up on the Yukon River, it is returning to a new normalcy after several devastating years of natural disasters. Those same challenges caused the riverboat Yukon Queen to permanently cease operations --a fact most locals actually find a relief --no more busloads of often appallingly unappreciative visitors. A new cafe and small hotel complex is rising three stories, this time a bit farther from the river. The repairs to our compound there too are almost complete, at last again allowing moments of reflection and appreciation as opposed to purely perspiration.

New News

'Twas the season of three, count them three, new itineraries, though each was a variation on old standbys. All extended the time in favorite locales (Denali, McCarthy and Homer to be specific), lessening the hasten of the long distances between, and allowing guests and guides a bit more leisure. No matter the itinerary, the state hasn't gotten any smaller and transit here continues to have a different meaning than in Rhode Island. Besides, we have to give ample road opportunity for critter sightings and flat tires. . .

Maybe it's a reflection of age, but less motion seems to be appreciated more and more, even though most folks' vacation allotment hasn't changed accordingly. Pesky work life. There evidently were enough that have left that constraint, and thus were able to opt for the longer trips, as one of each was filled. All three inaugurals garnered positive feedback and so will be remaining in the lineup. Yipee.

Sorta new too, is the success of the revamped one-of-a-kind Iditarod itinerary, changing from an Adventure to a Tour --drive dogs, sleep in a bed, a concept at which the real mushers might scoff. With winter moderating, it truly is a great time of the year, particularly when centered on a defining event that in many ways is the seasonal reawakening for many Alaskans. C'mon up.



The Chisos, or Ghost Mountains (yes, Texas)

Well, the only other news that now is officially new, is we're AT LAST open for visitors at our desert operation in the Big Bend area of southwest Texas. In a bid to offset some of the seasonality of the far North, both in livelihood and length of winter, we're inviting folks to come share a place of surprising parallel to Alaska in its haunting beauty and remoteness. Here too the land dominates, and its severity is integral to its beauty. There are rugged mountains, a wild and scenic river, and lots of solitude and most certainly, the unique ilk that chooses to call it home.

Pulling primarily from our past northern guests, this is a much smaller scale program, hosting just two to six folks at a time during a few week window in the fall and spring. Trips are customized from a selection of offerings detailed on the website www.adventurealaskatours.com/bigbend thus promising an experience tailored to the interests of each group. There's a tremendous number of options, both in destinations and desired degree of exertion, with a minimum of five days needed for a first visit, and seven to ten allowing much more flexibility.

Guests will base from our "compound", located just south of the ghost town of Terlingua, between the huge Big Bend National Park and a massive State Park to the west. Of course it's not near anywhere and that's part of its saving grace. We've already reservations for 2013, but still have space this fall . . . c'mon down!

And, in keeping with the timeliness of the Neanderthals, we have joined 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. Also, if you'd be inclined, trip reviews on TripAdvisor.com are much appreciated! Thanks.

Staff Updates

Leaving the best for last, we give you our annual guide update. In the tenuous climate of the last few years, we maintained a skeleton staff, with **Patrick** (his 19th year with us!) shouldering much of the guiding. A replenished schedule put a spring in his step as he consummately shepherded new and returning guests across the wilds, nimbly skirting potholes, clouds and snafus. He's headed to Hawaii for a stint and on to Australia by sea, before returning to California to train once again for a half marathon in Death Valley. Suggested training grounds too, are in the Big Bend visiting us! **Sheri** and **Michiel** alas did not guide this summer but did just buy their sought after abode in the south of France. They're both headed back to Antarctica for another season (gots to pay for these things). We had the delight of hosting Michiel this fall for a few weeks before he starts his stint at Palmer Station (less than 50 people!) on the other side of the continent from Sheri in McMurdo. They'll be apart for the duration but we're relishing the thought of all together sharing a wine on their new deck . . .



How they actually got after hours rooms at Meiers Lake . . .

Kathleen & Chris made it to Hope for several wonderful visits, filling in as "emergency" guides. And Chris actually retired from teaching. **Barb, Todd and Liam** managed to survive another one. The cabins keep Barb in Hope most of the summer, while the boys did some time (and some work!) in Eagle and McCarthy. The whole crew (dog too) managed to sneak away for a few unique camps at Spencer Glacier, accessed only by "whistlestop" on the Alaska Railroad. Great fun. The traditional end-of-season-wound-licking is in McCarthy, before heading south in October to ready the desert compound for our first guests. Yikes. All in all, a good year for all, and all still feeling quite fortunate to do it.

!!! 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! Or, the Big Bend! We'd love to see you again.