

adventure

ALASKA

September 2014

Volume 20 Number 1

Passages

Each year is a different one for all of us. For our wee world of Adventure Alaska, there were many wonderful moments, and some considered less so, but each part of Life. As for trips, the new folks in our lives were without exception delightful, and the opportunity to travel with dear friends from the past, a real treasure. Some of those veterans would be the Allison's from the land of Kiwis, who first traveled with us on the Yukon River --twenty-one years ago! They returned for the Iditarod in 2002, and most recently with two more generations, to again share that unique winter world.

In speaking of the past, some of you who've been with us from the beginning will remember the always engaging personality of Todd's mother Jeannine, who for years answered the phones during, "the season", and met many during her 25 trips to Alaska. Sadly, she passed on last fall, but remains a part of our spirit from the beginning. As part of initial research, she offered to pay for the fuel one summer for wherever Todd wanted to wander in a newly acquired bush plane. Adventures led all across the north, often sleeping under the wing while exploring many of the far flung places that we still feature. She too was responsible for a half dozen cross-country van delivery odysseys, each time crewed by a half dozen women, all from different worlds (including Patrick's mother Ghislaine!). 'Twas always an adventure. Happy trails.

Another bump in Life is the one below, where Barbra was put out of commission during our always idle, summer season. Thanks to a very large unrestrained dog racing to attack ours, she, the Protector, stepped between and was catapulted skyward. Nasty break of the knee meant a passel



of new hardware installed within, and no weight bearing for two months. We all did our best with our battlefield promotions (maybe not always cheerfully!), and she's now back to being able to limp around the block, sans crutches. She vows to again be wreaking vengeance on mountains next summer, making up for the somewhat altered one this year.



Those humans, that scene ---ya'd think it Photoshopped!!!

On the decidedly wonderful side though, was the pleasure to travel with the likes above, three generations of assorted Frasers and wedded kin. Arriving from all over, we did have rain, but more so just sun and fun --and yes, that's The Mountain. We don't often host twenty souls as a group, but did so also this season with faculty and students from Creighton University, here in Alaska gathering footage and interviews to put together a film exploring native subsistence culture. I wish there was space to mention each individual, and to name those that came that were not part of a juggernaut, for they too all were grand.

New News

For those of you that have followed the last couple of these annual bloviations, you might recall mention here of an intentional attempt at a lessening of chaos in our operation, so that selfishly, we might do some of the summer things that we came here to do, lo these many years ago. This summer was the first try at carving some moments out of the "season of chaos", in the purely self-interested goal of adjusting slightly the ratio of profit to play. With the impact of the VLUD (very large unrestrained dog), in more ways than physical, we're even more committed to fostering that selfishness (making up for lost time!). So, for the future we've lessened our offerings, with some of the more challenging ones like the Arctic Explorer, becoming but a fond memory.

And, even though our beginnings often included laying on the ground (sometimes known as camping), inquiries for itineraries involving such have steadily declined in recent years. That, coupled with the fact that there's but a single guy left willing to drag poor souls through the rain and poison them with his cooking, offerings in that department are slimming a bit too.

As not to lead you to believe that there's some groundswell of sanity afoot, do remember that we've ensured keeping life nutty by opening that wee operation in the nearby state of Texas. This last fall we had the privilege of hosting Bill and Lorena Hardam (also of Alaska veteran status), for two weeks of exquisite hiking, boating, happy hour sunsets, and even a walk through mud in the desert! 'Twas grand. Not many Texans even know that there's a 8000' mountain range and a river with 1500' canyons in the state. And that's one of the reasons it's so darned special. Volkswagen-sized belt buckles don't float.

In line with that desire to bend the season, the Big Bend operation falls during a few weeks only so far; parts of autumn and a bit of spring. Pulling primarily from our past northern guests, this is a much smaller scale program, hosting just two to four folks at a time. So, take out a map and trace your finger way down to far southwest Texas, and that "big bend" on the border. Or, take a peek at the website www.adventurealaskatours.com/bigbend and get an idea of why we think it's pretty special. C'mon down!



The Wild and Scenic Rio Grande - on a bit of a chilly day

And yes, even while we profess to hiding from potential customers, we are in the process of revamping our dusty web-site, hopefully to end up with something that doesn't look as if it was created before the web was. Take a peek in a few (months???) On that digital note, we did in recent years join the age of social media. Yes, we're still Neanderthals but we do 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 very much appreciated. Thanks.

Staff Updates

As for staffing, we've slowly pared that down through attrition (not Barbra!), in keeping with the stated glide path of less. Still, and hopefully forever in the saddle, is of course **Patrick** (his 21st year with us!). He shoulders much of the guiding, and as many of you can attest, he's consummate at it. Besides the novelty of co-guiding the two big trips with Todd this summer, he kept up his long standing contacts

scattered across the state guiding his usual itineraries in his usual fashion, solo. Exciting news from his front, are his very first tours in France this fall. After two decades of pondering it (and fending off many requests), he's just completed leading past northern guests of ours on a custom experience in Brittany, and has another crew scheduled shortly for Provence. If you've ever thought of a truly personal experience in that fine country . . . We hope that he'll again be able to stop by our world in the Big Bend, with the need to cross the country from east to west after a leisurely "repositioning" cruise (meaning cheap and uncrowded) of a couple of weeks from Barcelona to San Juan, Puerto Rico. **Sheri** and **Michiel** continue to manage their long absences apart, by making the most of when they're not. Both are headed back south for the winter (though distinctly not in the fashion that most envision with those words) --he to Palmer Station in Antarctica and she to South Georgia Island. They bought a delightful abode in the south of France a couple of years ago, one needing a *little* modification to make it comfy and habitable ---and we all know that you need a job for that job. We're waiting until all the work's done of course, to see the fruits of their labors next fall.



Crampons make it look so easy

For those of you who remember guide **Heidi** from the '90's, she (and her husband and two daughters) just bought land in our wee community of Hope, and "hope" to start building on it shortly. See, it really is a family. Speaking of another one, **Barb, Todd and Liam** had to of course modify a few plans this round. Barb learned to pilot a couch for long stretches, through gritted teeth. Though the year changed for some outings, we are still, supremely fortunate. The boys did manage to "sneak" away for some rewarding overnights, from the Eagle work camp, to hikes, to a music festival. Oh well, the rivers should still be going the same direction next summer. In October all will be spending a few weeks exploring northern California before the Big Bend beckons.

!!! 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.