Colville Update

Arctic Ploverland News

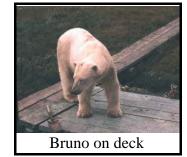
Spring, 2000

Greetings From the Jim Helmericks Family

Out of the Ordinary

Here on the edge of the Arctic Ocean, life goes on much the way it does for most families. Sleep, wake, work, play, eat, cleanup, talk, share.... So what can we share with you that might be out of the ordinary, something that might be newsworthy? Well, after careful thought, the 18 day visit of a young polar bear this fall might fit the bill. Bruno, as we named him, showed up September 1st quite early in the morning. Jim spotted him strolling down the river bank when he took Toby out for a morning run, which came to an abrupt end as the dog was hastily called back indoors before he saw what he would immediately take as an intruder. That morning we took numerous pictures of the young male as he wandered around sniffing out whatever he could find of interest, which turned up half a sack of fish lying near Toby's doghouse.

Those were soon history. Bruno checked out the various buildings, including our porch and deck around the house, be for e wandering off to sleep draped over a large



straw pile by our barn. We no longer have barnyard animals or birds that would have been endangered by our visitor, so we decided to give the bear free rein as long as he posed no threat. He ended up staying around for 18

days. We would go about our day, giving Bruno a respectful distance, and he would watch us and act not the least concerned or menacing. He found and dug up some fish we had buried for fertilizer and snacked on

those. He claimed the area around the e unused barn, and his favorite lounging area was on top the straw pile



Aaron, Isaac, Jay, Derek

in the shade of the barn. Sometimes he would lie in the edge of the lake to cool off, or go for a swim. We all enjoyed watching him and wondered what had brought him ashore during those late summer days, when normally polar bears live out on the

ocean ice eating seals. Toby was not happy to be cooped up indoors all those days with only carefully orchestrated housebreaks in the opposite direction of wherever the bear happened to be. After living a life of ease at Colville Village, Bruno finally decided to head back out on the sea ice where he truly belonged. He had given us ample opportunities to observe and

photograph him, even to the point of having to shoo him off our front deck several times when he grew fond of napping there, or eating plants out of Teena's flower planter. How inconsiderate!

Family News

All the family is doing well. Teena and Jim are getting a taste of an "empty nest" as this letter is being

written, since all four boys are down in Fairbanks this week. •Although he is gone to town for dental/eye appointments temporarily, Aaron is the only boy still at home on a regular basis as he completes his senior year of high school. Aaron plans on attending the University of Alaska Fairbanks this fall and

majoring in computer science. continues to make us proud with academic excellence, and hard work ethics during his home an summer jobs. ♦Isaac now works full-time for Alaska Airlines in Deadhorse, and divides his days off between staying with his brothers in Fairbanks, coming home to the Colville, and traveling. ♦Jay is closing in on completion of his master's degree at UAF and has continued to lead the student rocket research there, even heading up the successful rocket launch with a student designed payload. ♦Derek is still working as an engineer at the Fort Knox Gold Mine, and Melanie on her advanced Geology degree, and they continue to live in Fairbanks.

Special Event

Teena was able to attend the launch of the UAF Student rocket at the Poker Flats Launch Facility just outside Fairbanks in January. NASA had

provided an Orion rocket engine onto which the student team had built an intricate payload section full of electronics for measuring various atmospheric conditions. After numerous weather and technical delays, the rocket finally launched after 1:00a.m. climbing 53 miles into the Saturday night sky. Much of the design and workmanship was Jay's. It was very special to get to witness how Jay managed and orchestrated such a complex venture with competence and skill. We truly have a "Rocket Scientist" in our family!

Travel

pecial trips have always been highlights of each year, and we had our share this past year. ♦Teena had a wonderful trip with her big sis and brother-in-law up the Alaska Highway last May. She flew to Spokane to accompany them on their first trip back to Alaska in many years. It was Teena's first trip north along this scenic drive through Canada into Alaska. ♦In early June Teena was able to join rest of her siblings and mother for a joyous two days on her brother Mark's boat down in Valdeaz. Teena's first Valdeaz adventure proved to be spectacular with encounters with a bubble-ring feeding humpback whale, a nanny mountain goat and newborn kid balancing on a cliff above the boat, and many other amazing sights. Teena's mother out-fished everyone as usual. ♦Teena, Isaac, and Aaron made their annual pilgrimage by boat up the Colville for camping, riverbank combing, and general fun in August. They always come home with many treasures like ancient mammoth bones, tusk pieces, and petrified wood. New plants for Teena's garden usually clutter the boat too. Aaron and Teena took a week in December to go to Seattle for a few days and then visit Teena's younger sister Marti and husband Dick in southern Idaho.

◆Derek spent vacation time hunting and playing here on the Colville River with Isaac in September. It was great to have him home for a few days, although the two boys were gone on expedition most of that time when not re-suppling themselves with Mom's cooking, boat fuel, or other gear. Derek was able to harvest two caribou to add to his meat supply. ◆Isaac has been branching out with snowmachining adventures in the Fairbanks area since buying himself another fancier Skidoo, which he keeps in Fairbanks. Riding companions are easy to come by when uncles and brothers are really into powder snow escapades. Because of the many, many hours Jim spends away from home during his flying season, he is content to keep the home fires burning when other family members are out gallivanting around.

Extra Ti<u>dbits</u>

We enjoyed having the Cessna 206 back on floats this past summer after 4 years of no float flying jobs. Although she spends most of the time on wheels, she looks the best sitting on the water, and we look forward to the coming float-flying season.



♦It hardly seems right to share a picture of our C-206 without showing off our old faithful "Golden Plover" super cub that has been part of the family for nearly 40 years. She got a new rebuild and paint job a few years ago.



Visitors

We enjoyed having Teena's mom, and her sister, Merrily, and husband Steve with us for part of June. They helped out with many maintenance projects always in need of doing while enjoying good visiting and a few boating expeditions. We also had many other visitors including a delightful couple from Germany here to photograph the many local birds. Always enjoyable are the people we have staying with us in connection with the biological studies we support and Jim flies for. We even had two delightful little girls stay a few days with us last summer while their mother was busy flying caribou surveys with Jim. (Girls have always been pretty rare around the Colville.) ♦Winter ice roads brought many visitors to see our museum and collection of arctic memorabilia. We always enjoy sharing the results of the family's insatiable collecting habit.

GOOD BYE FOR NOW!

Love,

Jim & Teena
Derek & Melanie
Jay, Isaac, Aaron

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