

News from Nan

TRAVEL

ALASKA 2015

JUNE 11, 2015 | ANNA



Mt McKinley

From May 28 to June 11, 2015, we participated in a Road Scholar trip to the South-Central part of Alaska.



Places we visited in Alaska

Our group consisted of 20 people. Our activities mostly involved hiking, boating, photography, and education. Particularly interesting to us were discussions about the wildlife and their ecosystems. The photo below of a receding glacier, taken on our flight in to Anchorage, symbolizes the many environmental challenges we heard about and observed for ourselves.



Melting glacier from the air

Anchorage

We started our trip with three days on our own in Anchorage, a “rough-and-ready” city that reminded of places we have lived in and visited in Colorado. The Anchorage Museum and Native American Heritage Center are outstanding.

The train ride

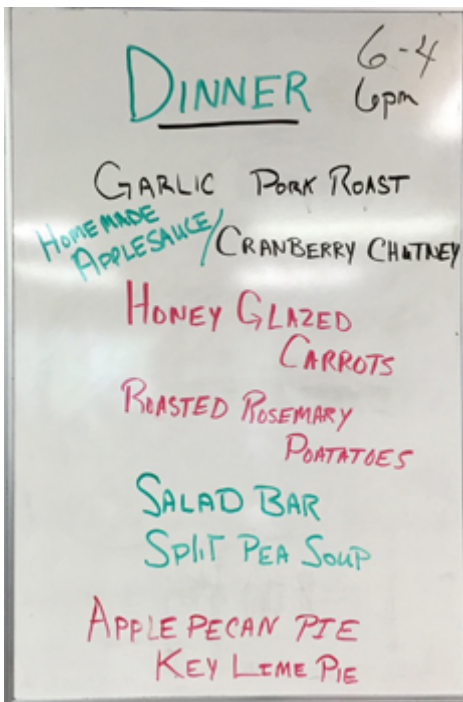
The Road Scholar portion of the trip began in Denali National Park, which is situated between Anchorage and Fairbanks to the north. To get there we took an all-day train ride on the Alaska Railroad. One of our most enduring memories of the ride was the unobstructed view of Mt McKinley (its name is controversial: in Alaska, it is mostly called Denali). We were told only 20% of all visitors see the mountain while they’re here: it’s almost always covered by fog or clouds.

Denali

In Denali we stayed at cabins furnished by the Denali Education Center (DEA), our sponsor of that portion of the trip. The cabins and Center buildings are located on the Nenana River, just outside the park. The food, accommodations, education, and hiking opportunities were wonderful: hosts Luke and Rose did a wonderful job keeping us active, happy, and well fed.



View from our cabin window at the Denali Education Center



June 4 dinner menu at the DEA

Our activities included a trip to the Husky center, many hikes, and a bus trip to the end of the dirt road (the only road in the park). We nearly froze on our first hike on Savage River! After that we all learned to wear the 5 or 6 layers we needed to keep warm: although it had been in the 60s in Anchorage, the temperature in Denali hovered in the 40s and it was often windy and sometimes rainy.

Click an arrow to start a video.

Denali National Park sled dogs



Grizzly Bear in Denali National Park



The early (giant) mosquitoes were already present, but (as the Alaskans say) they are slow and relatively easy to kill, and the cold wind kept them at bay. We're just as glad the smaller, more nimble and vicious insects don't come out until later in the summer season! Larger critters we saw included grizzlies, Dall sheep, moose, caribou, and beavers.

Field guides and lecturers Roy and Patrick were great spokespeople for the state of Alaska, the national park, and the local flora and fauna. One memorable talk by Roy explained the extremely complex adaptations required to keep the wildlife alive and healthy. He also explained the ecological dangers in removing keystone predators (for example, wolves) and prey (for example, snowshoe hares) from the ecosystem.

Kenai Peninsula

After almost a week in Denali we were transported by bus to Moose Pass, located on the Kenai Peninsula, which is south of Anchorage. The Peninsula is generally warmer and wetter than the Denali area. Our wildlife focus was on sea creatures, and we spent two days in Seward at the Sealife Center and on a boat trip around Resurrection Sound where we saw whales, sea lions, sea otters, porpoises, and many birds.

Our host, Steamer, and guide, Mike, also took good care of us, fed us well, and supplied us with local lore. On our trips to the Sealife Center we heard about wildlife projects ranging from local rescues (for example, walrus) to attempts to save or reintroduce entire species (for example, eider ducks).

Hats off to Alaska

We especially appreciated the Alaskans' (most of whom are transplants from somewhere in the "Lower 48") obvious love of their wild and beautiful state, and their efforts to balance tourism with the needs of the creatures that help to draw both new residents and tourists to their state.

◀ 2015 ◀ ALASKA ◀ ANCHORAGE ◀ BOATING ◀ DENALI ◀ HIKING ◀ JOHNSON ◀ KENAI ◀ VAN RAAPHORST